# THE MONEY MAKER

*The ROMANCE of a RUTHLESS MAN*

IRVING R. ALLEN

Aug-20-18

A. L. Ellsworth

U. S. Assistant Indian

Out in the ocean swam Dave and Rosalie
(*Page* 223)

# THE MONEY-MAKER

## The Romance of a Ruthless Man

BY

IRVING R. ALLEN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ROBERT W. AMICK

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To My Dear Friend
Ray Long

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## I

### ENTER DAVID POWER

LONG before the lights began to burn brightly and people started to refer to the section of Chicago around Twenty-second Street and Wabash Avenue as "the District," a prosperous German saloon-keeper named Pottzer had erected a building of his own, housing his family, saloon, eating place, bowling alleys and turner hall. But with the change of character of the neighbourhood, this building passed into the hands of Abe Kelm, an ex-prize fighter.

Retaining the name of the original owner, Kelm had closed the third-story bowling alleys for good and refitted the place for his purposes. The entrance was a great stone arch leading to the dance floor above. One side of the arch was flanked with a Chinese restaurant and the other by Kelm's bar. As if in irony, the structure was painted a snowy white and each year hundreds of dollars were spent keeping it as spotless as the door of a New England church.

All day long the ground floor bar did an excellent business. But in spite of its prosperity this was a mere side issue, for only after twelve o'clock at

night, when the lights flashed up on the second floor, the waiters took their stations and the orchestra began to play, did business really begin.

This, the second floor, was the real "Pottzer's," known from Coast to Coast and back again.

Day in and day out, year after year, from midnight until as late as nine or ten the following day, Pottzer's was a maelstrom of undisguised hell. Drunken men, intoxicated women, rushing, perspiring waiters, wild music, and back in the checking station—four cash registers ringing like Gatling guns. How much money Abe Kelm made no man knew but it must have totalled a tidy fortune every year. And hour after hour through the seething crowds circulated the ex-prize fighter, buying a drink here, stopping to shake a hand or two there and casting a bow and smile across the room like a Gargoyle-faced sovereign graciously receiving his loyal subjects.

It was about eleven, one night in the early Winter when Kelm arrived at the front door—or doors—of his establishment.

He cast a critical glance at the whiteness of his front, then satisfied with the inspection, stepped inside, removed his overcoat, unlocked the bar register and began silently to study the strip which showed the day's receipts. It was his first duty of the evening, this balancing of the cash.

As he studied the printed figures on the paper tape, the front door opened, admitting a policeman. Out of the corner of his eye, Kelm noted the new arrival but calmly continued his task.

The policeman slouched to where he stood.

"Well, how about a drink?" he asked.

"Sure," answered Abe mechanically, but as he recognized the man a look of surprise came over his face.

"Since when," he asked, looking meaningly at the blue coat with its brass buttons, "have you been wearing a uniform?"

The other understood.

"Since today," he answered bitterly, "I'm not a detective any more—I'm just a plain policeman."

Kelm called to his bartender.

"Hey, Tommy, fix Cramp up with a drink. What'll it be?"

The policeman pointed and the white-aproned one placed the bottle on the bar.

Cramp tossed off his drink and looked down at his uniform contemptuously.

"Ain't this hell?" he asked.

"It sure is," assented Abe. "How'd it happen?"

"Oh, the boss went up before the Board yesterday and had me put back in uniform, travelling a beat like a flatfoot."

"Sore on you?" questioned Abe cautiously looking for information.

"Sore as a boil! Says I've been robbing him blind, holding out on the dough I got for him from you guys—" He paused for sympathetic comment but received none; Abe Kelm was diplomatically silent.

The patrolman resumed:

"After all these years I've done his dirty work for him, this is a swell way to treat me, isn't it? And what gets my goat is that the real reason

O'Brien gave me the toss was because he wanted to put that pet of his—Dave Power—in my place. But he can't fool me; I know why he did it." He paused and emphasized his next words: "And I'll tell you something, Abe. If it's the last thing I ever do, I'll fix that Power, fix him good and right! Give me another drink."

As Abe pushed the bottle toward him, the front door opened and the patrolman drew back a little from the bar and wheeled as if to leave.

But the new arrival stopped him.

"Just a moment, Cramp," he said pleasantly as he unbuttoned his overcoat. "What're you doing here?"

"Dropped in to talk to Abe about something," muttered Cramp.

"Is that so?" said the newcomer, looking at him closely.

He was short and fat and insignificant looking —was Alderman O'Brien—but when his lips thinned under the short-cropped moustache and his beady eyes began to burn, he had a faculty of making the other fellow decidedly uncomfortable.

"You just happened to want a drink, you mean," he continued, and his words came clipped and crisp. "Now, listen to me, Cramp: I've got something to say to you and I'm going to say it right in front of Abe here. I'm a pretty good-hearted sort and so I'm letting you off easy for what you've done to me. Instead of having you kicked off the force, I'm just putting you back on a beat, wearing your star where everyone can see it, and with a box to pull as a reminder that you're working. But be good,"

a sudden menace crept into his words, "be *real* good, or you'll get yours. I never want you to set foot inside one of these 'joints' where you've been collecting for me. If I ever even hear of it happening again—well, you know what I'll do! And you know I keep my promises. Now, *git!*"

Abe smiled at the Alderman as the patrolman vanished.

"Guess you made him understand all right. Who do we pay from now on?" He asked the question innocently.

"Dave Power," answered O'Brien. "That's what I came in to tell you."

"Oh, Power, is it?" asked Abe in well-simulated surprise. "Say, he's a real right lad, he is."

"Correct," said the Alderman briefly. "Worth ten like that daylight robber, Cramp."

"And I'll say something else," said Kelm suddenly loosening up: "I like this Power boy. I'm for him strong, and so is everybody else around here." Then, ashamed of his outburst and retiring back into his shell of reticence: "You're kind of strong for him yourself, aren't you, Alderman?"

"Why not?" asked the Alderman, biting off the end of a short, viciously black cigar. "I've practically raised him from a pup—or watched him grow; it's the same thing." He puffed a light from the proffered match and exhaled a great cloud of smoke. "Did I ever tell you how I got hold of that kid?"

"No, you didn't, but I'd like to hear." Kelm openly interested, shoved aside the cash register strip

and signalled his bartender to bring a bottle of wine for the Alderman.

"It's a funny slant," mused O'Brien. "You know Schmaltz, the baker, down in the First Ward?"

"Sure, I do; tightest-fisted Dutchman that ever came across."

"You've got him. I was talking to him one day—must have been ten years ago—and he tells me about a kid that strayed into his bake-shop."

"'I wass stung this morning—and I liked it!' he says. You know, Kelm, anybody that could hand it to Schmaltz is clever; and then on top of it, making him like the operation—that's a real miracle, so I asked him how it was done. And he tells me. Wish I could imitate his funny accent:

"'A leetle poy comes in this morning. He asks where is te poss and I says I am te poss; what did he want? Te leetle poy says, "Want something to eat—I'm hungry."

"'Haff you any money?' I ask him.

"'No,' says he, cool as a cucumber, 'I haven't—but I got a grand appetite.'

"'So I think I will joke him a leetle; I say: "You have no money, why should I give you food?"

"'Because you have it and I haven't and I'm hungry.' And he wasn't pegging; he talked like a grown-up man.

"'And py Gott he made me feed him: bread and pie and sweet cakes, and when he got through I asked him if he wanted to work for me.

"'He said: "No—I'm going to sell papers."

"'And then I asked him where he was going to get his papers if he didn't have any money.

"'And he said I would give him the money to get started.

"'And py Gott, I dit!'"

Both men laughed, the Alderman openly and loudly, and Abe Kelm with a choking semi-chuckle.

"Was the kid, Power?" asked Abe.

"Yes, but let me tell the rest of it," said the Alderman. "One day Schmaltz pointed him out on the corner, the young one who had made him set him up in the paper business. And I kind of kept an eye on him: he was a bright, clean-looking little shaver.

"He made money all right—couldn't help it. And fight—say, he was a young wildcat. You know how those news kids have to battle to hold their corners. Well, he had the best stand in the ward, and he held it too.

"I happened by one day when a Dago—a full-grown man—tried to take his corner away. This big bruiser had him beaten to a pulp, but the kid wouldn't stop until he was knocked out. It was a shame that nobody interfered, but you know how it is—liable to get a knife in you or something—anyway a fellow on a street sprinkling wagon turned the water on and brought the boy to. The minute he got his senses, up he came—back again—and by God! he kept it up until the Dago ran away—he licked him! He wasn't entitled to win—he wasn't half big enough or strong enough to have a chance—but the Dago finally got scared because he couldn't stop him; there wasn't an ounce of quit or fear

in that kid's whole body. I'll tell you he was game."

"Still is," remarked Abe laconically. "But he isn't a bully."

"No, he's a real gentleman," assented the Alderman. "But I'll tell you, now that he's got the size and the muscle hooked up with that spirit of his, when he does start, look out!

"I guess you know the rest of the story. I took him off the news-stand when I got in the City Hall, brought him down here in the First Ward and started him keeping the boys in line."

"Yes, sure, I know that, but you forgot to say who his folks are or where he came from?" commented Kelm curiously.

The Alderman laughed, "I don't think he could answer that question himself, Lord knows I can't."

"He's been studying law for the past year or so, hasn't he?" queried Abe changing the trend of the conversation. "What's going to happen to that now that you've made him a detective—won't he have to give it up?"

"Sure, he will," answered the Alderman. "But what's the difference? I had to have a new collector and Dave was elected. Besides, between you and me, this law thing was giving him high-toned ideas—spoiling him for me."

"I never noticed it. He never showed the swelled head around here."

"That wasn't it, but the way he's been dressing —like the rich lads that hang around the Auditorium—and the way he talks—no more 'dis, dat and dose' in his—but at that he's always been some little talker, hasn't he?"

"Without being loud or noisy, that Dave Power could talk a stone to life," said Abe earnestly.

"Talk some money out of it, you mean," the Alderman corrected, as he buttoned up his coat. "Well, I just wanted to give you the news so you could pass it along. He'll probably drop in on you this evening, so better have a little money ready."

"We've always got ready money around here," replied Abe, and as O'Brien left he muttered to himself: "And the fellow that's coming for it is a bigger man, a gamer man and a smarter man than the fathead who sent him."

With which wise reflection he finished the register slip and climbed the back stairs to the dance hall above, where business was beginning to show signs of briskness.

An hour or so later, David Power, the man they had been discussing, entered the hall. He was tall and lithe, wide-shouldered and steady-eyed, with strong features surmounted by black hair with just the suspicion of a curl. Women invariably looked twice at David Power—and what was more significant, men did the same.

His dark clothes were of fine material, but simply cut. No jewelry beyond plain gold cuff links was in sight.

As he sat at ease in a little wire chair by a table, he looked about as little like a detective as any man possibly could.

Kelm's eye caught the new arrival almost the moment he entered.

"Well, boy," he said, seating himself and motioning for a waiter, "I'm glad to see you—the

boss was in and said you'd probably drop up to-night."

"Told you what I was coming for too, didn't he?" Power's inflection was excellent—he spoke well.

"Leave that to him," Abe smiled back. "What's yours?" The waiter had arrived.

"Scotch," answered Dave laconically.

"Same here," nodded Abe. "Bring the bottle and a tumbler for Mr. Power."

"Whiskey '*B*'" suggested the waiter, emphasizing the letter.

"No," responded Kelm curtly, "the real stuff."

Power laughed as the waiter moved away.

"Where did that Whiskey 'B' idea come from, Abe? The last year or so everybody on the line has been using it."

"Sure they're using it—it's a money-maker—but I started it myself five years ago," answered Kelm. "You know 'Whiskey B' means 'Whiskey Bunk,' —imitation whiskey—ginger ale in a whiskey glass. Of course, these girls all get a commission on the drinks that are bought for them. It used to be that they'd get so stewed that about four or five o'clock in the morning there'd be nobody left for the customers to buy for—they'd all be under the table. So I got to figuring on how to get around it and keep my 'saleswomen' on the job.

"First I tried having them pour out their drinks into the cuspidors. But the fellers found that out and got sore—it didn't work. And then I hit on this '*B*' gag, and it not only enables the girls to drink a hundred or more drinks a night, but there's

more money in it—cold tea or ginger ale in a whiskey glass at twenty cents a throw—plain water instead of gin—say, Power, it makes booze profits look like a peanut stand."

"Good idea, all right," said Power casually. "But for my own use I prefer the real thing."

"And so would I," said Kelm admiringly, "if I had about half your capacity for the stuff."

Dave laughed. The waiter had returned and was setting out the glasses and the bottle. Kelm poured himself a small drink and then slowly and reverently filled the highball glass that stood in front of Power, a third full of raw, undiluted liquor.

Holding the glass to his lips, Dave tipped it, the whiskey ran smoothly down his throat and he replaced the empty tumbler on the table. Kelm finished his small drink and smiled admiringly.

"At fifteen cents a drink, Power, you'd put a bar out of business in a week. Where in the world do you put that liquor, anyway? I've seen you drink enough to put ten men under the table and never even show a sign."

"Why, I don't know, Abe. The stuff doesn't affect me. That's all. I kind of like the taste of it, but so far as 'kick' is concerned, I just don't get it—might almost as well drink a good strong glass of water as the best booze on the bar."

"Lord," said Abe enviously, "I wish I could say as much for myself. Why, boy, that capacity of yours is worth real money."

"I'll remember that," said Dave as he smiled and looked around.

The hall was practically full. The female occu-

pants of "Pottzer's" chairs were an exceptionally good-looking, well-attired group of women, but just a shade too pronounced in their toilettes.

He glanced back at the proprietor, who was regarding him through half-closed lids.

"Say, Dave," said Kelm, veiling his meaning with a semblance of carelessness, "Cramp was in this evening—uniform and all."

"That so?"

"Yes—and he isn't exactly what you might call in love with you; in fact, from what he said, I'd advise you to look out. He's pretty sore—and they say he's a bad guy."

"Thanks," rejoined Dave dryly. "You can bank your bottom dollar I'll look out for him. I'm not seeking any 'accidents.'"

"Power," Abe was openly curious, "why didn't O'Brien fire Cramp clean off the force, instead of just putting him back on a beat?"

Dave looked at him.

"Because Cramp is still strong with the State's Attorney's office. Pozinski will stand for shoving him in a uniform, but if he was fired off the force—out of a job—there might be trouble."

"I see." Abe's face was a study in blankness.

Dave's roving eye fell upon a girl who was just entering the hall. She was young and good to look upon.

Her golden red hair was covered by a severely plain black velvet hat. Her suit was expensively simple. She carried it with an air.

Power turned to Kelm.

"Who is that?"

Kelm followed his glance.

"How do you like her?" he asked critically. The girl advanced into the room with an air as demure as that of a school miss.

Rouge and powder had been used but in quantities so slight as to be almost imperceptible. Her dead white complexion naturally shadowed with purplish pink needed no artificial aid. The full red lips were a trifle sensual but the glance Power received from her wide opened blue eyes was so frank and innocent that he involuntarily turned to his companion:

"She doesn't belong here," he said half questioningly.

"You think not?" Kelm raised his voice. "Hebe —come over here a moment and sit down."

The girl smiled composedly and complied with the roughly voiced request. Dave noted that she looked even better on close inspection.

"This is a good one. Dave Power here didn't think you belonged in Pottzer's. He kind of figured you'd started for church and got in the wrong door. How long *have* you been here, anyway?"

The girl, removing her white gloves, answered slowly and quietly.

"Oh, about a year."

The girl's rich, warm tones furthered the impression her looks made.

Dave, in spite of his sophistication, was astounded.

"This is Hebe Norse, Power," said Kelm. "Now, girl, you want to be nice to this gent, for he's Alderman O'Brien's right-hand bower, and a

detective sergeant besides. We'll just have a little drink on the house. What'll you have?"

"I'm very glad to know you, Mr. Power," the girl said and came forward and shook hands with him heartily; then turning to the waiter, "I'll have a Scotch highball, please."

Dave slid back into his chair and philosophically resumed the mask his astonishment had lifted for a moment. The three drank, chatted a moment, then the girl arose, and turning to Power remarked:

"I am glad to have seen you." She spoke simply but Dave almost imagined he read something in the big blue orbs that had not been there when she arrived.

After chatting a few minutes longer, Power arose, and bade Kelm good-night. As he strode toward the door, the girl Hebe, by this time seated with a group, looked up, her eyes bright and full of invitation. He half paused and smiled.

"Good-night, Mr. Power." She paused meaningly. "Hope I see you again soon."

Dave smiled and nodded and half on impulse flung back over his shoulder a few words he thought she didn't hear.

"Look me up some time," he said.

Unheeding the cold, for he was strong and young and virile, he walked down the street toward the house where he roomed.

## II

### POLICEMEN DISAGREE

THE next night David Power arrived at the Sixth Precinct Station early. Walking behind the desk, he began examining the blotter of the day's arrests.

The noise of the creaky cell room door made him look up. It was Patrolman Cramp.

"Good evening," said Dave pleasantly, and resumed his examination of the blotter. The other muttered something incoherent.

The telephone bell jangled noisily. The desk sergeant answered and handed the instrument to Dave, grinning knowingly as he did so.

"Hello?" snapped Dave into the receiver.

"Is this Mr. Power?" It was the voice of a woman, rather a pretty voice Dave thought.

"Yes, Power talking!"

"This is Hebe Norse. Do you remember me?"

"Certainly, I remember you," answered Dave. "How could I forget you?" and as he spoke the last words he regretted them and looked up to see if anyone was listening. The desk sergeant had stepped back in the cell room. His only auditor was Peter Cramp, the patrolman, who had seated himself in an armchair inside the rail. Their eyes met and Dave read aright the hatred written there. Hebe was speaking again:

"I've got a little cold and can't go out. Why don't you come up and see me? I live over in the Briarson Apartments on Cottage Grove Avenue. You're right around the neighbourhood all the time, aren't you? Won't you drop in for a minute or two?"

Memories of the girl's fresh beauty flooded his mind for a second; then he cursed himself for a fool and regained control.

"No chance. I don't fool around with women when I'm on duty. You've got a lot of nerve calling me up here. Don't do it again."

Without waiting for an answer he hung up the receiver and turned away. He had entirely forgotten Cramp—but Cramp had not forgotten him. He had listened eagerly to every word of the conversation.

Ignoring the ex-collector, Dave started to open the gate and walk out from behind the railing.

"Playin' 'round with dolls, eh? You're a fine guy to take my job. Watch me get you one of these days, old boy."

Dave wheeled; quickly the other sprang to his feet, his breath coming heavily and Power's sense of smell told him immediately that Cramp had been drinking.

"Dressed up in that light suit like some Michigan Avenue dude and out after the women. You're a fine detective, you are. You are a rat—a dirty, double-crossing rat—" The blue coat fumbled in the direction of his gun pocket. Immediately realizing the significance of the action, Dave seized him by one arm, almost lifted the man across the room

and shoved him into the street, closing the door behind him.

Cramp hesitated a moment, his face contorted with rage and fury, but finally turned and slowly walked off toward his Cottage Grove Avenue beat.

"I'm going to have trouble with that fellow yet," Power reflected. "The Alderman ought to have him transferred out of here. I'd better speak to him about it."

He put his feet on a desk and settled down to reading the paper.

All evening, thoughts of Hebe Norse lurked in the back of his mind. Along about twelve-thirty he drifted leisurely to Pottzer's, but she was not there and he walked out again.

"The Briarson Apartments," she had said. They were over on Cottage Grove Avenue, hardly a stone's throw away. Without definitely making up his mind to see the girl, he strolled over in that direction, laughing softly at himself for being an impressionable fool.

Against the bar of a saloon which stood on the corner of the alley which flanked one corner of the Briarson Apartments, stood Peter Cramp, the patrolman. It was after closing hours and the bartender was nervous, but the star of his unwelcome guest enforced service and he nervously watched the bluecoat empty glass after glass of whiskey.

Finally the officer left unsteadily by the alley door and with a sigh of relief the bartender closed up for the evening.

As Peter Cramp emerged from the alley, not

fifty feet away, Dave Power walked toward the Briarson Apartments. In spite of the month, the weather was mild. His overcoat was over his arm —one hand in a pocket and an unlighted cigar between his teeth.

The grey suit, the broad shoulders, it was Power; the light from the arc showed Cramp his face distinctly. The recognition was instantaneous and mutual.

What freak of a liquor-crazed mind made him draw his gun and pull the trigger, Cramp himself only knew, and he will never tell because five seconds later he fell, pierced through the heart by a bullet from Dave Power's service revolver.

For a second or two Power hesitated and looked around. Not a soul was in sight; he leaned forward over the body, dropping down to one knee and quickly closed his hand over the stiffening fist of the officer, which still clutched his blue steel weapon. Pointing the muzzle up the alley, Power rapidly tightened his grip five times, and each time the weapon exploded with a ringing crash.

Then, quickly leaping to his feet, Power carefully aimed his own weapon down the empty alley and fired the remaining shells.

A police call box stood at the edge of the curb. He wrenched it open and put in a call; and then, carefully shielding the match from the wind, lighted his cigar as he waited for the wagon.

Up and down the street, windows were being flung open and heads cautiously put out. A few people appeared here and there, looking uncertainly about for the trouble.

Power turned and saw Hebe Norse, with a luxurious fur coat hastily thrown over silken night array, standing there

A slight cough came from the doorway back of him. Power turned, and saw Hebe Norse, with a luxurious fur coat hastily thrown over silken night array, standing there. She called to him.

He walked toward her slowly.

"What's the matter, Mr. Power?" Her assumption of coquettishness was decidedly out of place with the dead man lying in front of the door —only half-concealed by Power's overcoat hastily thrown over him.

"Fellow trying to break in a place down the alley. He shot the policeman and I ran down after him but he got away. The wagon'll be here in a minute."

"That's rather odd," she said musingly.

"What do you mean?" he spoke sharply.

"Just this: The steam made it so hot in my room, I couldn't sleep and I got up to open the window for a breath of fresh air. Just then I heard a shot almost underneath. I looked out and saw a policeman standing there with a smoking gun in his hand."

"Yes?" Dave's eyes were boring into the girl's very soul. How much did she know? He must find out—and before the wagon came. She continued:

"And almost at the same instant another shot was fired and I saw the officer fall. The man who fired the shot—by the way, was just about your build, and—" she looked meaningly at Dave—"he wore a grey suit like yours."

Thoughts were racing at express speed through Dave's mind. Already he could hear the brass

gong of the patrol as it came down the street. What was to be done?

The girl was speaking again:

"So I 'phoned the station and told them to send the police!"

She too, heard the approaching wagon and leaned forward speaking more rapidly. "But if I'd known you were wearing a grey suit tonight I'd never have called them."

Dave read her meaning correctly. His clockwork mind brought to light the one remaining danger point.

"I called the Station—so did you. They'll trace that message and try to find out what you know—how you came to call."

The girl's answer came so quickly on the heel of his words that it was almost one sentence. The wagon was drawing closer every minute.

"I 'phoned the police because I heard shots. That's all; I *saw* nothing. Good-night." And without a backward glance she scampered up the stairs.

In due time, after plenty of cursing and conjecturing and examining the alley, the remains of Patrolman Cramp were loaded in the wagon and Dave climbed aboard with the rest. He looked at his overcoat and swore softly to his neighbour.

"Got my new coat full of blood when I threw it over him. I wonder if dry-cleaning will take out the stains."

"Sure it will. I've had it done many a time myself," replied the officer nearest him, with an admiring glance at the "hero."

Next morning's papers carried a full account of

Detective Sergeant Power, who, seeing Officer Cramp felled by the shot of a burglar, at the risk of his own life pursued the murderer up a dark alley, while bullets flew past his devoted head. Unfortunately for the sake of law and order, however, the miscreant escaped.

Hebe Norse read the account in the afternoon editions and laid the paper down. Then she looked up and smiled at David Power—for he was paying his first visit.

And—he looked thoughtfully back at her.

## III

### DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

DAVE POWER climbed out of the barber's chair, put on his collar and carefully knotted his cravat, under the admiring eyes of the manicure lady, the porter who held his coat, and the tonsorialist who had just removed his stubble and received a tip for the service.

One door of the barber shop opened on a dark passageway, leading to the little lobby of the hotel; the other fronted on the street.

Outside, a coating of glassy ice made footing treacherous and a forty-mile wind liberally salted with fine, cutting snow, did its best to blow pedestrians down.

One look at the weather and Dave decided to substitute the telephone for a trip he had to make.

He went to the telephone booth and called a number.

"I want to speak to Mrs. Lake."

"Hello, this is Power. Got it ready? Bring it over here. I'm at the Marlborough Hotel."

Evidently the woman on the other end of the wire was also aware of weather conditions.

"Certainly it's a bad night," he replied to her protestations. "What has that to do with it? I'm here and you'd better hurry.

"Nothing doing. You can't send your maid or

anyone else. Bring it yourself. There's only two people concerned in these little transactions—you and me—and we're not letting anybody else in even as a messenger. Hurry up."

And with the word he replaced the receiver, strolled over to the desk and lighted a cigarette.

He looked at his watch. It was eleven-thirty and he had promised to meet Hebe Norse at eleven-fifteen. He strolled back to the 'phone again and called her number.

"Couldn't help the delay. You'd better drop over to the Marlborough Café. I'll be waiting for you."

The café which he mentioned was on the main floor of the hotel, a saloon restaurant which was locally noted for the excellence of its fare. Like the barber shop, it had a door opening on the lobby.

A chair stood by this entrance. Power seated himself in it, thus securing a position of vantage from which he could watch the café for Hebe's entrance and the hotel lobby for the arrival of Mrs. Lake.

Eva Lake was a tall woman, in the early thirties, with a face of exceptional beauty and an air which would have marked her anywhere. As she reached his chair, Dave rose and with an air of solicitude as pronounced as if he were not responsible for her being out in the storm, exclaimed:

"This is too bad. I had no idea that it was storming so. Come right in here," leading her in the café entrance and seating her in a dark booth, "I really feel guilty about having you out in this weather."

Eva Lake smiled languidly.

"Don't you all try to fool me, with that soft talk, Dave. You were figurin' how you could get out of makin' the trip to my place and the best way you could work up was to make me bring the money to you. So here I am, and that's all there is to it."

Dave laughed. He liked it on the rare occasions when people pried off the veneer and laid cards on the table face up. Eva Lake had an even temper and a happy faculty of frankness.

"Well, I'll buy you a drink and send you home in a cab, anyway."

"Never mind the drink. I'm in a hurry. And I'm goin' back in the same cab I came in. Here's the money—count it and see that it's all there and not counterfeit."

Dave thumbed the bills and looked up. His eyes wore a serious expression though his mouth was smiling.

"You've made a little mistake, Eva. There's only a hundred here and the boss raised it an extra fifty a week. I told you the last time I saw you. Sorry you forgot."

"I didn't forget." A hard line marked the soft flesh on either side of the woman's mouth. "I'm not goin' to pay it. A hundred is enough—more than enough—and the boss knows it."

"You can see him if you want to," he said kindly. "But it won't do any good. You know that what he says sticks; he doesn't change his mind. And—you can talk that way to me and get away with it, but you can't with him. If he gets sore, he'll close you up like a shot."

"Yes, I know that." The woman looked away a moment then turned back. "I might as well pay and get it over with. You can come and get the other fifty in the morning. I haven't got it with me. But believe me—" her eyes were hard and bright—"that big, fat, grafting Alderman is going to get his one of these days, and I'm going to give it to him.

"I'm getting tired of this town and when I get ready to go, I'll do my level best to leave a fire behind me that will burn his bones to a crisp."

Dave had heard this kind of talk before—many times from many humans—it had entirely lost its effect upon him. When he spoke his words were almost mechanical.

"You don't mean that, Eva. You're just talking to hear yourself talk. We're the best friends you've got."

Hebe Norse, dressed as if she had just stepped out of a bandbox, closed the street door behind her and the wintry blasts outside. Recognizing the deep tones of Dave's voice she followed her ears to the booth and unnoticed by either the man or woman, heard only Eva Lake's last remark:

"Well, Dave, you'll be over in the morning then —about eleven?" And to the eyes of the jealous woman, the conciliating smile which accompanied her parting remark was one designed to charm and lure.

Like a flash—eyes wide distended and lips parted —Hebe confronted the two. Surprised as he was, Dave thought to himself that he had never before seen her so beautiful.

"So *that's* the kind of a sweetheart you are!" Her breath came in gasps and emotion almost overcame her. "Making a date with another woman before you keep one with me. I could kill you both!"

Her voice had risen almost to a scream. The waiter hurried toward them. Dave turned to Mrs. Lake.

"See you in the morning. Good-night."

As she acted on his hint and left, quietly but firmly he placed Hebe, in whose eyes big tears began to stand out, in one of the leathern seats of the booth and seated himself beside her. Looking up at the waiter, he said:

"When I need any help, I'll make my wants known. But as long as you're here, go order a big sirloin with French fried potatoes—bring a couple of Martini cocktails and a bottle of Scotch."

Turning quietly to the girl, he remarked:

"You know my business—that's part of it. I'm not going to take the trouble to explain again, so you had better let this soak in. Eva Lake and I have business dealings—that's all. And if you ever make a fool of me like that again, we part. Understand?"

Like one who had not heard, Hebe looked at him—unnoticed the tears were running down her face. When most women cry their noses get red—she had the unusual gift of being able to weep effectively and prettily at the same time, a rare endowment and a precious one.

"You'd better be good to me, Dave—better

behave yourself, or something will happen to you that will make you stay put."

Power read her meaning correctly and for a moment hesitated. But he was hungry and did not want to spoil his dinner.

"Let's eat now and talk later."

The time consumed by the dinner enabled Hebe to regain her poise. But Dave mentally noted that her appetite, usually excellent, was at an ebb that denoted great agitation beneath her calm.

They talked little. It was Dave, lighting a cigar, who reopened matters.

"Before dinner you said something about my being 'pretty nice to you'?" inquiringly.

"I did—and I mean it!"

"Just what did you say? I've forgotten."

"I said: 'You'd better be pretty good to me.'"

"Why?" Dave simulated innocence and relighted his cigar, which was burning down one side.

"You know why—" she lowered her voice—"I've got something hanging over you, and if you're not good to me, I'm going to let it drop—right on your head."

"You are?" Dave pretended bewilderment. "I don't know what on earth you're talking about."

"Oh, yes you do. You know every minute, and you're going to keep on knowing. If you want your memory refreshed—although it doesn't need it—all right. Listen: somebody in a blue coat with brass buttons and a star. And—somebody with a star but no brass buttons. And two guns. And a funeral. I guess you won't forget *that* in a hurry."

"No, I won't forget it very soon."

Dave paused and looked at the girl reflectively.

"Now, Hebe," he said, "I want you to get every word I say. Don't miss one. Certainly I know what you are talking about, but—if you've been saving that shooting as a club over me, take my advice—" he fairly spat out the next words—"throw it away—and pray to God that you can forget you ever knew it."

"Oh, don't get sore, Dave. I was just joking," Hebe, cooling as Dave grew heated, tried to brush the subject lightly aside, but the man had no intention of letting it drop.

"I have decided that if the thing ever does come to light," he continued as if she had not spoken, "that I've done all that any man could do in protecting you as far as I have. Of course, there are extenuating circumstances—no matter what a judge might think, *I* feel that you did right. The officer insulted you—but of course, you committed a crime in the eyes of the law when you shot him—"

"When I what?" Hebe was so startled she raised her voice, then lowered it.

"When you shot Cramp, of course," Dave watchful as a hawk and knowing that no one was within hearing distance, spoke easily in his natural tone.

"Hush, not so loud—you did it—*not* me." Hebe looked furtively around.

"Don't try that, girl." Dave's voice was pitying. "You don't have to defend yourself. When I told Alderman O'Brien about it, he said it was all right to keep it dark. You needn't be afraid—of anyone but yourself."

A sense of oppression was settling over Hebe Norse.

"What did you tell the Alderman?" she asked.

"I told him the facts, of course," he said, looking steadily at her. "You and I were standing in the doorway. My gun was in my overcoat pocket. I took it out to put it in my hip holster, when you asked to look at it. At the moment, Officer Cramp came up. Not noticing that it was I, he ordered us to move on, at the same time calling you a vile name. He had been drinking but you didn't know that. As I turned to tell him who it was and reprimand him for his language, you fired and he fell.

"Under the circumstances, feeling that my duty as a man was stronger than my duty as a police officer, I protected you by inventing the story about the burglar.

"I've taken a long chance for you, but if you were to try to saddle this on me in some crazy fit of jealousy, I'd tell the truth—make a clean breast of it. I've gone as far as I'm going with it."

"My God," wide-eyed with horror—aghast at the seeming plausibility of the tale which fell so easily and convincingly from Dave Power's lips, Hebe shrank back in her seat.

"Dave, Dave, you wouldn't put that on me, would you?"

"No. *I* wouldn't. The only person who could make the truth come out would be you, yourself." With a sudden change of manner, Dave finished brusquely, "Forget it. We're a fine pair of sweethearts to be talking like this."

As he watched her, he was tempted to permit him-

self to smile. The victory was won. The lips of the one witness of his affair with Officer Cramp were sealed forever. And, like a wise general, he turned the tide into pleasanter channels.

"Now, I'm going to tell you something."

"What?" and the tones of her voice indicated a response to Dave's changed mood.

"I am going to be nice to you—very nice. And not because I'm afraid of you, but because—why do you suppose?"

"Why?" And the question was a sigh of eagerness, hoping for the magic one word answer because Hebe was as deeply in love as her type ever can be.

"Because I *want* to be." And she felt herself engulfed in two arms that folded around her like a protecting wall. For a moment or two there was silence, then she looked up at him adoringly and in her words was a note of pride.

"I believe you would put that killing on me, Dave, to protect yourself."

"Certainly I would," he answered in a matter of fact way.

And she kissed him rapturously, for such is the heart of women—of her kind.

# IV

## THE SOFT SIDE OF A HARD MAN

THE wind and snow had disappeared when the two emerged from the café. Although the night was still bitter cold it was crystal clear and Dave drew in great lungfuls of the invigorating air as he shortened his long stride to accommodate the steps of his companion.

The brilliantly lighted windows of an all-night drug store reminded Hebe of some needed toilet necessities.

With quiet amusement Dave watched Hebe shop. The first item was face powder. He knew and she knew that she would end by purchasing the same brand she always used. So did the clerk. But before she arrived at a decision, the glass showcase was covered with powder packages representing everything the store carried. When she was thoroughly satisfied that the entertainment afforded by the place in the shape of powder, was exhausted, she picked out the brand she had looked at first and turned to the momentous matter of toilet water.

The thing was past the joking point. Dave was getting impatient and almost at the point of hurrying her, partly through sympathy for the half-distracted clerk and partly through sheer ennui when the door opened and closed behind a new customer. Dave welcomed the interruption.

"Go ahead and wait on him," shooting a quick, professional glance at the blue ulstered man who was approaching the soda fountain.

His steps were a trifle slow and uncertain. At first, Dave thought him under the influence of liquor, but a second glance at the dead white of his hollow cheeks tinted with a hectic flush told a different story—the man was ill, desperately ill.

He leaned against the soda counter and spoke in a low tone of voice. The clerk, a red-eyed, thin-lipped youth, looked suspiciously at the man with the blue ulster and made no move to serve him. For a moment he hesitated to make sure that his audience —Dave and Hebe—were attentive. Then he spoke two words in a tone as insulting as a grating voice and a hard heart could make them.

"Nothing doing!" he said, and turning from the fountain back to his two original customers, began to set bottles of toilet water on the case as if no interruption had occurred.

The man in the blue ulster grasped the marble edge of the counter weakly, straightened up, coughed a trifle and shuffled slowly toward the door.

Dave, who had missed no detail, turned to the clerk.

"What did he want?" he asked.

"He wanted a hot milk shake. One of them lungers—we don't serve 'em. No chance. Might give a good customer consumption from the glass he drank out of."

The invalid was fumbling with the door latch as Dave turned and spoke: his voice rang out bell-like across the room.

"Wait a minute, brother. Come back here."

Hebe looked at him in amazement. The clerk's mouth opened. The consumptive turned questioningly and found Dave already at his side with one arm half around him.

"Come right over here and sit down. We'll fix you up in a jiffy!" His voice was as smooth as velvet and carried a note of sympathy and feeling that Hebe had never dreamed was in the man.

The clerk had emerged from behind the toilet goods counter and in a bewildered sort of way stood watching the detective seat the man he had just refused to serve, at one of the tables. Dave straightened up and spoke.

"A hot milk shake for this gentleman, please." His voice, still smooth, took on a steely note.

"Why, I just refused to serve him. We don't want our glasses—"

"Shut up! Mix the drink!" And with the words Dave shot out an arm, seized the clerk's shoulder and wheeled him behind the fountain almost in one move.

Thoroughly cowed, under Dave's watchful eye the youth dutifully prepared the beverage and Dave himself served it to the haggard-eyed, half-dazed man at the table.

Gracefully as an old world host, Dave waved aside the invalid's thanks, refused him the privilege of paying and smiled him as warm a good-night as a brother might.

Paint, powder and fripperies forgotten, Hebe had watched every detail of the proceeding. She noted that as the door closed behind the consumptive, the

smile faded from her man's face and his eyes grew grim.

The grumbling clerk, coming from behind the counter to pick up the empty glass, mumbled to himself.

"What are you saying?" Dave's question came sharp and clear and impelled an answer.

"Well—a—you know I hadn't oughta done that but you made me. Somebody's liable to catch the 'con' from that glass. It's dangerous."

"Wait a minute." Dave stretched out his hands, preventing the clerk from picking the glass from the table. "What do I owe you for that drink?"

"Fifteen cents."

"And what's one of those glasses worth?"

"About a dime, I guess."

A crash and the glass lay in a million pieces on the marble floor. The detective smiled and looked full in the eyes of the startled clerk.

"No man will get disease from *that* glass. Here's a quarter. You fool, I've cheated you out of something. For twenty-five cents I've bought something that a million dollars won't bring."

"What's that?" the frightened clerk, fully convinced that he was dealing with an insane person, sought to humour him.

But it was a sane, cool Dave that spoke.

"That man needed something—needed it bad—he had the money to pay for it and he couldn't get it. I got it for him. It cost me twenty-five cents and I've got a feeling of satisfaction in me right now that I wouldn't sell for fifty dollars.

"None of us is safe. Some day I may need help

or you may need it. And if that time comes for me I want back of me the knowledge that I'm entitled to something because I've done a few things for other people. You let the opportunity slip by—I took it. I cheated you because the opportunity was yours and I am the gainer.

"Listen, boy," his tone became more kindly and he took the other by the shoulder, "don't forget that the world pays its debts as surely as it turns around. If it owes you trouble, that's what you get; and if it owes you the other thing—

"Oh, Hell, what's the use? Hebe," turning, "got your stuff yet?"

"I've changed my mind, Dave. I don't want anything tonight." Hebe had turned strangely serious and as they passed out into the clear, starry night she turned and looked at him, standing stock still to do so.

"You're the strangest human being on earth, Dave Power. Half devil, half angel. I don't know what to make of you."

Dave looked back at her and smiled amiably.

"I'd do as much for you," he said.

Suddenly the events of the earlier evening flooded back in her mind and she shuddered a trifle.

"Yes, I know you would," she said, and her meaning was different from his.

Still serious, the girl spoke again:

"Dave Power, you've good blood in your veins. You're not like the rest of them down here."

Involuntarily Dave straightened up and set his teeth.

"I don't know what kind of blood it is but it's

good blood because it runs fast enough to keep me moving. No, I'm not going to stay. One of these days I'm going to start climbing, and when I do I'm going to rise up to where I belong and when I get there I'm going to stay."

"Well, well, well, what's the big idea—making a speech?"

The two turned and Dave laughed as he recognized Abe Kelm.

"Dave, I'm glad I ran across you. Got something on my mind. You better come where we can talk it over."

Hesitating a moment, then realizing that the owner of Pottzer's was not accustomed to waste time or words on trifles, Dave bade Hebe run along and the pair sought a quiet bar nearby.

The dance-hall owner lost no time in getting down to business.

"I want to give you a tip. Be as careful as you know how and then twice as careful as that. If you don't, you're going to get it and get it bad."

"Do you mean somebody is gunning for me, or am I going to lose my job—or, what do you mean anyway?" Dave took the warning seriously, knowing his man.

"You don't get me at all. You must be asleep. Now we know that this town is run by politicians. So do the big business men of our metropolis. These business men have had a falling out with the powers that be and they've organized what they call a Citizens' Committee. This was tipped to me straight, tonight."

"Yes?" Dave was listening intently.

"The State's Attorney is in with the business crowd. He's been in wrong with our gang ever since he went in. Between the Citizens' Committee and the State's Attorney, they're going to catch some guy taking drag money and he's going to be the centre of a big scandal. Now, do you understand? They know you're collecting for O'Brien and you're marked."

"How do you know?"

The question was almost silly. As he asked it, Dave knew that Kelm would not answer and he was right.

"Never mind. I *do* know, and that's enough. There are two reasons why I don't want to see them get you: One is, I'm for O'Brien; and the other is, I like you."

Dave's mind was working like a machine, turning matters over and over, sifting and searching and analyzing.

"Have you told O'Brien?"

"No."

"Why not? He's the boss—the man that's got to know."

"All right. I know what you're figuring and I'll ease your mind on that. I said a while ago I like you and that's why I've come to you first. I wanted you to be warned. If I'd gone to the boss, it might be that for some reason he would want to keep you in the dark and would have tipped me to keep my mouth shut and I'd have had to. So, I've spilled to you first. Now, you get in touch with him."

Here was food for thought, indeed. Citizens' Committees alone would have been a jest, but work-

ing hand in hand with the State's Attorney's Office put a different complexion on affairs. Kelm's words aroused Dave from his thoughts.

"And the thing for you to remember, Dave, is: they've got men out right now; they're on the job this minute. So look out. Now you know as much as I do, and I guess I'll go."

"Thanks, Abe!" the farewell was spoken automatically for already Dave's mind was revolving around the new situation, trying to read behind the lines.

His first impulse was to 'phone O'Brien and see if the Alderman was up and willing to see him. On sane second thought he realized that nothing could be done before morning and he settled down to wait.

Bright and early he sought the boss. Over a late breakfast table and a heavy cigar, O'Brien listened intently to the words of David Power.

Finally he arose and looked out of the window, chewing his cigar meditatively.

"That all sounds pretty reasonable to me," he said. "You know Cramp was Pozinski's man and ever since the copper was put away he's figured that I was sore over his stealin' from me and put you up to do the killing."

The Alderman looked quickly at Dave as he made the reference to Cramp's demise. It was Power's first intimation that his employer suspected anything different from the story of the shooting that had been given out to the papers.

"Well, Alderman, no matter what Pozinski thinks, you know better. You know I wouldn't kill

a flea even if he bit me." And he concentrated on the most winning smile he could muster.

The other did not return the smile.

"Mebbe not—but—I'd hate to be the flea." Dismissing the subject, O'Brien continued: "But that's neither here nor there. The big idea is that you've got to get the money every week, same as usual, and at the same time, steer clear of the State's Attorney's men. Now, how're we goin' to do it?"

Dave had been doing some thinking along this line himself.

"Monday's always been our collection day. Suppose we made a change and dropped in on the joints unexpectedly—whenever the coast looked clear, whether it was Monday or Tuesday or any day. Keep the whole bunch guessing so they wouldn't know when or where to look for me."

"That's a good idea. You go ahead and operate that way for a week or two. It's only a question of a little while before they get tired and call off their dogs. And—I guess you'd better keep away from me until I send for you. You can leave the money as you get it with Clancy's bartender, Tim—he will know who it's for."

The interview was over. Dave rose to go.

"I'm wondering," he said slowly, "just how much of a jam this is going to turn into."

"What'd'y' mean?" the Alderman spoke quickly.

"Just this," he answered thoughtfully. "There have been reformers and reformers' detectives in the district before, looking for graft and grafters. Abe Kelm joked about them. He didn't about this; in fact, I never saw him more serious in his life.

And of all the bunch down here he comes nearer knowing what he's talking about than any of them.

"And then I come up here and tell you about it. You've been in this game for years; you know what you're doing too. You don't laugh or joke; you immediately agree that I'd better take precautions, and on top of it you tell me to keep away from you. Why don't you come clean? I'm up against something and I'd like to know what it is. Don't make me fight in the dark. I'll put up a better battle if I know just what I'm doing."

"Are you scared?" There was no sneer in the Alderman's words.

"Not a little bit. But you want to remember that I'm your man and in order to protect you I should know what's up."

The Alderman rose and paced the floor uneasily.

"Here's all you need to know. They're after me hot and heavy. But I've covered every crack and corner and unless somebody plays me wrong, I can't be reached."

He wheeled and faced Dave.

"I'll tell you just how serious it is. If I didn't need the money so bad, I'd lay you off for a month or two months, if necessary, right now. But I've got to have that dough, chances or no chances, and you get it for me. But—be careful."

"H'm——" Dave's eyes were opened now and he saw things in their true light. He considered a moment before he spoke.

"See what you think of this. Get somebody that you can trust and have them trail me day and night. Then if these fellows should get me, you'll know

where I am and can get me out quickly—before they have a chance to try to make me talk. Don't worry—they can third degree me 'til the cows come home and I won't open up, but at the same time, you don't want them to grab me and hide me out, and I think you'd better play safe and have somebody watching all the time."

"That's right. It's a good idea. And I want to tell you something else." The Alderman leaned forward. "The chances are even money that you're going to get caught but you've got to keep on goin'."

"In other words, I'm in a hell of a fix!" And Dave smiled pleasantly to cover up his feelings. "When are you going to put my shadow to work?"

"Right away," and the Alderman turned to his 'phone and made the necessary arrangements.

As he walked down Michigan Avenue, Dave took a look at the man who was to be his shadow for an indefinite length of time, marked his appearance well, noted that he wore a particularly violent green hat and promptly dismissed him from his mind.

Under present circumstances, close as their relations were, pleasant and tempting as her company, he felt that he could not afford to see Hebe or let her occupy even a portion of his thoughts until the atmosphere cleared a little.

Suddenly he thought of Eva Lake, and the fifty dollars which she had promised to turn over at eleven o'clock in the morning. Well, he would get that anyway before he started to be extra cautious, so he turned his steps and in less than ten minutes was walking up to the front door of a brown stone house.

The maid who opened the door was a little breathless and excited, he noticed. Involuntarily he turned to see if his shadow was in evidence, covering the movement by flicking his cigarette to the walk, then laughed at himself for the feeling of relief that came with his sight of a green felt hat in a doorway across the street.

"Yassa, yassa, Miss Lake's at home. Jes step in the parla, sah." Dave turned toward the first door. The girl grasped him frantically by the coat sleeve. "No sah, not in thea, back heah, in the second parla."

Preoccupied, he permitted himself to be led into the dimly lighted second parlour. He didn't seat himself but stood looking into the mirror over the mantel. He turned at the sound of a footfall.

"Admiring yourself in the glass?" queried Eva Lake. "Pretty vain, aren't you?"

"I was just looking to see if I was getting old—felt that way this morning and wanted to see if I looked like I felt."

"Hard night last night?" Evidently Eva was trying to inject an element of sociability into this strictly business visit, but Dave was in a hurry.

"Not exactly a hard night—rather a long one though. I dropped over to get that fifty dollars."

"Oh, you came over to get the money for that thieving Alderman O'Brien, did you—the graft money—the money I pay him for the privilege of running this place—the money you collect for him? That's what you came for, is it?"

Had there been a tinge of bitterness in her voice, Dave Power would have acquiesced readily, but her

tone in direct contrast with the words she uttered was sprightly and exuberant. Always wary, present conditions made him doubly so, he refused to commit himself, even here in the privacy of the heavily hung room.

"Better get the money, Eva, and let me get out. I'm in a hurry."

She sparred. "I've got the money. Here it is," producing it from her dress. "But I want a receipt for it—a receipt from the Alderman, not you."

She stood facing him. By this time his suspicions were burning furiously. He held out his hand and said nothing.

She looked at him, still retaining the money, and spoke.

"You're collecting money for Alderman O'Brien. I want to know that it goes to him. How do I know that he gets it?"

A slight rustle came from the curtain behind her. Every sense on edge and keyed he heard it and read the message correctly.

Could he—should he back out now? No, it was too late. They wouldn't let him go. One step toward the door and he'd be seized like a rat in a trap. His mind worked with piston-like rapidity and precision. The woman handed him the money—his impulse was to refuse it—what was the use—he took it and put it in his pocket. Leaning forward he spoke rapidly, clearly and loudly.

"I'm going to give you a little information, Eva. I'm the fellow you pay the money to and I'm the fellow who in return for that money lets you run.

The Alderman has nothing to do with it and knows nothing about it."

She looked at him and started to speak. He decided to precipitate matters and turned to walk to the door. It opened before his hand touched the knob. A slouch-hatted, dark-clothed man stood there pointing a big blue revolver at his chest. From the other curtains where he had heard the rustle which put him on guard, other men streamed into the room. He looked about him. Warned of the thin ice the night before he had already broken through. Was he going to swim or drown? Only time would tell.

"Well?" he said, looking about him. "Who are you people and what do you want?"

"You're pretty slick, young fellow," the man with the gun was speaking, "but we've got you dead to rights. You're under arrest. Hold out your mitts for the cuffs."

"Just a moment," Dave's voice was deadly cool. "You understand that I am a peace officer, do you? What and who are you? On what authority and what charge do you arrest me?"

He was sparring for time to size the situation. His answer came from the group who had entered from the front. An old man in clerical garb anticipated the officer's reply.

"You're a grafter. That's why you're under arrest. We've all been in that other room witnessing the whole thing. These are the State's Attorney's men and we've been waiting to catch you for a long time—you murderous grafter, you."

Dully Dave wondered whether the word "mur-

derous" carried a hidden implication, but as the old man used it several times in the diatribe that followed he decided that it was just a peculiarity of his speech.

"I'm the Reverend Boyd Sexton, Chairman of the Citizens' Committee. We're going to teach the murderous, plundering grafters of this city an example. Dr. Kincaid here, myself, Mrs. Wunderling of the Orphans' Mission and the two men from the State's Attorney's office all heard you admit that you are a grafter and saw you take the money from this woman. And the bills are marked. You can't deny it."

Dave was becoming bored.

"Well, boys," he turned to the State men, "if we're going somewhere, let's go. This is a nice house, but I'd rather be somewhere else." Smiling at the man with the revolver, "Put up the gun. I don't bite."

The trio, escorted by the heads of the Citizens' Committee, went out to a cab that had been called and hurried Dave into it. Not, however, before he had with a sigh of relief noted that a familiar green hat started into activity at the sight of him.

## V

### A TRAP IS SET

IN a small down-town hotel, State's Attorney Pozinski impatiently paced the floor of Room A-43. His lieutenants had 'phoned that they were on their way with O'Brien's henchman in a cab and that they brought the goods with them.

The rattle of a key in the door made Pozinski seek a seat. Apparently looking out of the window, he saw Power enter, shoved in by the two burly detectives.

He turned around, apparently surprised.

"Who you got here? Another of them?"

Dave noted the "another of them" and marked it poor strategy. There was no other—he was O'Brien's sole representative.

"This is Alderman O'Brien's collector. We caught him in the act—takin' fifty dollars from Eva Lake—marked money—witnesses from the Citizens' Committee—everything—enough to hang him."

"So—what's your name?"

"You know my name!" Dave had never met Pozinski but this cheap police strategy disgusted him.

"Ah yes, you're Power, aren't you?" The other was taken a little aback.

"Yes, I'm Power, Mr. Pozinski. What do you want?"

Pozinski was clever. Realizing the type of man he was dealing with, he threw off his mask of brutal-

ity and indifference, assumed a genial air and pointed out a chair.

"Sit down and we'll talk it over. Kerrigan, get me that box of cigars from the other room; then you boys go in there and wait."

He even held a match for Dave's cigar.

"Now, Power," he said, "you're in pretty deep. Between the virtuous howl from the Citizens' Committee and my prosecution, we can make an example of you that will help re-elect me and make the public feel pretty good. You realize that, don't you?"

"Certainly I realize it," answered Power.

"That's fine!" The State's Attorney rubbed his hands. "Now, Power, we don't really want you. You're small fry. You know who I'm after—your boss—Alderman O'Brien. And I'm going to get him."

"That so?" answered Dave non-committally.

"You bet it's so. Now, here's what I'll do. As State's Attorney I'll give you absolute immunity—you won't have to serve a day in jail or pay a dollar's fine—if you'll get up and testify to the truth, that O'Brien is the man higher up, that he got the money you collected. That's a pretty easy way out, isn't it?"

"And what if I don't?" Dave was sparring for time. He sincerely hoped that his green-hatted escort had been efficient in his duties. By this time, if they had not lost him, help should be on the way.

"Well, eventually I'll give you ten years in State's Prison. But before we give you that, you'll get the prettiest little third degree you ever heard of to make you change your mind and put the old bird

where he belongs. And what's more, I'm going to take back that offer pretty soon. If you don't agree before I get out of here, you can't change your mind. We'll send you up and entertain you in the meantime in a way that you won't like."

Dave concentrated his gaze on the State's Attorney. His big eyes burned.

"I'm going to make you two promises. The first one is that you can't make me talk about O'Brien because there's nothing to talk about." He turned his head to hold Pozinski's shifting gaze. "The second promise is that if you play that cheap third-degree stuff with me, you'll regret it the longest day you live. And that isn't a threat—it's a promise. Now, I've said all I have to say, and if you're through, good-bye."

Pozinski looked at him meditatively. In his heart, he was afraid of this cold, handsome youngster, but when he spoke his words carried no intimation of the fact.

"Well, we won't take you to any station. We'll just hide you away for a week or two or maybe a month. Kerrigan and his partner'll take charge of you and maybe the Alderman will sweat a little and we can get something when he finds his collector has disappeared."

A pass key twitched and the door flung open. In it stood Dave's green-hatted shadow, a police sergeant and six burly patrolmen.

Pozinski looked at the bluecoats, then at his men and finally at Dave, who grinned back at him in a friendly manner.

The sergeant of police said: "They sent us down

after a prisoner that's to be booked. Is this him?"

Underneath everything Pozinski had sporting blood. He laughed and his prisoner admired him for it.

"And did 'they' by any chance happen to send along a lawyer and a bondsman with you when you were ordered to make the arrest?" he inquired with elaborate sarcasm.

"Yis, soor, they did that. The two av thim arre right here in the hall," replied the bluecoat seriously.

The group separated, the officers going back in the patrol, Wellman, the attorney, Pozinski and Dave strolling over to the station, leisurely chatting about nothing in particular.

In the height of friendliness, Dave turned in his star, was booked on two charges, rushed before a magistrate for a private hearing which lasted exactly two minutes, the amount of his bail was set at ten thousand dollars; the bondsman attorney signed the necessary papers and a few seconds later he stepped out on the street, stripped of his authority and at liberty only by the grace of money against his return.

"Well, Power," said Wellman, "you'd better lay low for a few days. The boss," Dave noted with quiet amusement that the lawyer avoided using O'Brien's name, "will let you hear from him."

"All right," answered Dave easily. "He knows where to find me and when he gets ready, just send the word and I'll be on the job. Will you tell him something for me?"

"Sure, what is it?"

"Just tell him I said to get busy."

"That all?"

"Yes, that's all. So long."

Dave's rather bare little room on Indiana Avenue seemed about the most attractive place on earth to him as he walked over to Wabash Avenue and boarded a southbound car. He wanted a bath, he wanted a chance to be by himself, he wanted to think. The whole thing had happened so rapidly that it hardly seemed real. He was in a serious situation and he realized it.

In an emergency, Dave's mind usually acted like a flash, but this situation had so many elements and was so involved and entangled with city politics, that between the State's Attorney, Alderman O'Brien and the Citizens' Committee it required more than snap judgment to determine a safe course of procedure.

As usual, that evening he dropped over and spent an hour or so with Hebe. She, of course, knew nothing of the events of the day and Dave's manner varied not one whit from his usual self. He did not even seem preoccupied.

The one unusual thing, she afterward remembered, was his statement that he intended to go to bed early. At the time it surprised her, for it was the first time since their intimacy that he had ever voiced such a thought, but she passed it by.

He did go home and to bed, but not to sleep. As the clock in the landlady's room, down the hall, struck three, he had the entire problem lined up in his mind and his plan of action mapped out clear as crystal. His mind made up, he was fully at rest, then and not before he turned out his light, pillowed his head on one arm and dropped off to sleep.

## VI

### DAVID POWER ESCAPES

ALL the next morning, Power sat in the back room of a cigar store where O'Brien knew he could be found. He went without lunch. He hardly expected to hear from the Alderman on this, the first day, but like a man with an endless fund of patience he waited. It was typical of the place that no one had any comment to make. Every man around had read the newspapers and eagerly absorbed every detail but no one made a sign. The afternoon went faster than the morning. He played cards most of the time and won steadily. This he took as a good omen, for under everything, Dave was a little superstitious.

About seven-thirty he grew so hungry that leaving word with the man behind the counter he went out to eat. At a matter of fact, had he desired he could have sent out for sandwiches but he wanted a breath of air. The thought of a hot dish of chop-suey seemed particularly tempting so he turned to the nearest place which was the much beboothed Chinese restaurant under Pottzer's dance hall.

Not a soul was in the place when he entered and sought the darkest and most out of the way booth and Wing Lee, the cook, was the only man on duty.

Surlily at the opening of the door, Wing Lee laid down his long bamboo pipe, pulled down his white

apron and stepped out of his kitchen to see what this chance customer might want.

His yellow face broke into a black-toothed smile as he saw who it was. Dave was a favourite of his and on top of it all he had a choice morsel to chat about for under his Celestial mask of assumed stoicism, Wing Lee was a gossip of the most depraved type.

"Hello Misser Pow."

"Hello Wing. How're you this evening?"

"Me pletty good. You not so good?" inquiringly.

"Why don't you think I'm so good?" Dave threw his hat on a hook and seated himself. Silent and reserved all day he welcomed the opportunity to talk freely even if it were only with a Chinaman.

Wing Lee drew a long face.

"You takee glaft money. Police allest you. Go allee samee jail—blake lock."

Dave laughed.

"You meant 'break rock' but you said 'break lock' and that's what I'm going to do. You can't read English—you didn't see it in the newspapers. How do you know so much, Wing?"

"No can tell." Wing assumed a mask of gravity.

"No can tell," Dave mimicked the Chinaman, "well, all right. Anyway you're a wise guy, Wing—a smart man. I congratulate you on your wisdom."

Complacently the Chinaman looked up.

"Yes, me wise guy. No always clook—sometime makes sick people well—allee samee keep well people well."

"You what?" Dave couldn't make head or tail of his remark.

"I kleep well people well. I what you call a dlocter in China. Man pay me to keep him well. Velly difflent here. Man get sick this country, he call doctor—dlocter cure. Man pay dlocter my country to keep him well. He get sick, doctor get hell."

Dave knew that Wing Lee was an unmitigated and conscienceless liar, but the idea struck him as novel. He made a mental note, as he did of everything that interested him, and then scoffingly remarked:

"Wing, some day I'm going to string you up by your thumbs for lying to me. If you were a doctor, you were a poor one, but you are a rattling good cook. So beat it and make me some fresh chop-suey and leave out the onions."

Dave propped up the evening papers he had picked up on his way over and read the later accounts of his capture as he enjoyed Wing Lee's cooking.

Half way through his meal, Abe Kelm, hatless and shirt-sleeved, slipped into the booth and seated himself.

"Well, Dave, how you feeling?"

"That's what Wing Lee asked me when I came in this evening. I'll tell you what I told him. I'm feeling fine." And he grinned to prove it. "How'd you know I was here or did you just happen in?"

"They sent word up to me that you were here and I wanted to have a little talk with you. May not have another chance, you know."

"Why? Are you going away?" Dave asked innocently.

"No, but you are."

"Maybe not."

"Maybe not, but it's a ten thousand to one chance that you are."

"Well, where do you think I'm going?"

"You're not going over the road, to jail, that's a cinch."

"That's the surest thing I know. Look here, Abe, you know something and you're always under cover like a furnace in the cellar. Open up—don't spar around. Tell me something."

Kelm looked reflectively at the other a moment, then spoke.

"All right, I'll tell you something. The boss came in to see me this morning and said to tell you to jump the bail and get out. It's a straw bondsman anyway; he won't lose anything. And if you want the rest of the message—it was—get out *tonight.*"

Dave weighed the thing for a moment. He didn't doubt Abe's word, and if he was telling the truth it was a display of cowardice on the part of O'Brien that he didn't like. On the other hand, in this world in which he moved the double cross was such a popular emblem that he proposed to take no chances. His answer was short and sweet.

"Nothing doing."

Kelm let his liking for Dave make him talk more freely than his instructions justified.

"Boy, you're in bad. O'Brien is afraid of Pozinski and that Citizens' Committee and he has

thrown you down cold. All he wants is to never lay eyes on you nor hear of you again. No help from that quarter. Get me?"

"Yes, go ahead. What if I turn State's evidence for Pozinski? What about O'Brien then?"

"Why, he isn't afraid of that. By this time, he's got lines laid and witnesses framed by which he could prove perjury on you and you'd go over anyway. You're too smart to try that, Dave," Abe was in deadly earnest. "You know too that any guy who takes a job collecting graft money has got to stand the gaff and protect the other fellow if he's grabbed. If he squeals he gets his anyway. The only safe way to play is to do as you're told."

There was silence for a moment. The course Dave had decided on the night before had been flight but not under these conditions. Kelm was speaking again:

"If you're broke, I'll let you have some money."

Dave shook his head.

"No, it isn't your place to put up the money. That's what O'Brien's got to do. I'm not going to turn State's evidence or make a muss, but by the living God, the boss can't turn me down like an old shoe. He's at least going to say 'good-bye' and look me in the eye before I take a trip, or I'll know the reason why."

Kelm watched the flash in Dave's eye with admiration. Here was brain, brawn and nerve. Alderman O'Brien was due to be interviewed and he wished he could be present. At any rate, his message was delivered and he opened up the personal side.

"I've had a lot of experience with hiding out and I want to give you a little advice."

"Shoot!" Dave lit a cigarette.

"Don't stick in one place. Travel and keep on travelling. Cops move slow. By the time they've located you in one place, you'll be in another. I've got an idea for you. A friend of mine named Haskell owns a carnival company—a little circus—string of sideshows—regular street-fair outfit travelling from town to town—two nights in a place. You know the kind of layout I mean?"

"Sure, go ahead."

"You can join out with him—that'll keep you moving so they can't put their finger on you—and one of those travelling shows is a great place to hide."

"What am I going to have to pay this Haskell to take me along?"

"Not a cent!" Kelm brought his red fist down with a smash. "That's the best part of it. You're a good talker and he can use you spieling in front of one of his sideshows. You can get real money for it too—and to tell you the truth I think I'm doing him more of a favour than I am you."

The cigarette shot across the room as Dave snapped his fingers, plunged both hands in his pockets and slouched back with half-closed eyes to think. For fully ten minutes there was a dead silence. Finally, becoming impatient, Kelm coughed and spoke.

"How about it? Is it Haskell's for yours?"

"No." Dave sat sharply upright.

"What are you going to do?" Kelm was sur-

prised. He had considered the carnival outfit a real opportunity for the other.

"Much as I appreciate your thought—much as I like you—I'm not going to tell you what I'm going to do. This much I'll say, however, between you and Wing Lee you've given me an idea and I'm going to make money on it."

"What is the idea?" Kelm was frankly curious.

"None of your damn business." Dave took the edge off his remark with a smile, stood up in the booth and donned his overcoat.

"How'd you like to come with me, Abe?"

"Where are you going?"

"I am going——" pausing to lend emphasis to his statement—"up to call on Alderman O'Brien—at his house. If he won't see me, I'll have to see him. Glad to have you if you care to come."

In admiration, the dance-hall owner looked at the detective. Then he suddenly slapped his fat knee and guffawed.

"Wait, 'til I get my coat and I'll go. This is one on the Alderman and I wouldn't miss it for money."

Alderman O'Brien lived in a handsome three-story grey stone house on Michigan Avenue. A high, elaborately decorated but nevertheless, built-for-business iron fence across the front with a locked gate acted as a sieve for visitors and Dave remembered this as he started out. He remembered too, that the Alderman's servants were picked for brawn as well as serving ability and feeling sure that the front of the house would be closed to him, led the way around the alley.

Kelm began to get nervous.

"If you're going to fight your way in, I'd better beat it. Not that I'm afraid but you know I need O'Brien in my business."

"Nary a fight," responded Dave cheerfully and the next instant he rapped sharply at the kitchen door.

A red-faced cook opened the door to the extent of a chain bolt and looked out.

This was the crucial moment.

"The Alderman told Abe Kelm and me to come up the back way," he whispered and in his low tones was such an air of calm assurance that in conjunction with the face of Kelm behind him, the chain snapped free and the door opened.

"I'll just tell him you're here, he's in the dining room," and she started on her mission.

Swiftly Dave sped past her and before the startled woman realized that she had been tricked he was through the butler's pantry and in the dining room.

Two women and three men were in the party. The room was filled with a blue haze of tobacco smoke.

With his back to him sat Alderman O'Brien. The host was making a merry toast to the ladies and so unobtrusive had been Dave's entrance that the party thought it was the servant.

Kelm immediately behind him, chuckled silently and watched. This was going to be a treat.

Dave stepped forward and laid his hand heavily on the Alderman's arm.

Startled the man looked up—as his eyes met

Power's piercing, burning gaze, the wine glass dropped from his hand and the red Burgundy slowly spread over the table-cloth.

Speechless for a moment, he finally regained his voice.

"What—what are you doing here?"

"*You* wanted to see me." Power emphasized the first word.

"I didn't want——"

"*Yes—you—did!*"

Kelm noted with inward satisfaction that under the influence of Power's intent gaze—his strong hand, the redoubtable Alderman grew mild as a lamb.

Judging his time was ripe, Dave made the deciding move.

"It hadn't ought to take us five minutes," he spoke easily and without haste. "Can't we step out in the hall?" and with the word he almost lifted O'Brien from the chair.

"Yes—excuse me, please," to his guests.

At the door Dave turned and made a courtly bow in the direction of the women.

"I had no idea you folks were still at dinner. You will pardon me." And he let the portieres drop behind him.

"Come upstairs to my library," the Alderman fairly gurgled. "This is dangerous. You had never ought to have come here."

Carefully he closed the door and stood solidly on his feet, making no move to seat either himself or his guests.

Dave opened the conversation.

"I want two things from you and then I'll go—for good."

"What are they?"

"First I want a thousand dollars for get-away money."

"I haven't got it here—in cash." The Alderman thought to himself, once out of his house, Power would have a hard time getting in the second time. "I'd give that to you—sure I would—and gladly."

"I'll help you out, Alderman," it was Kelm speaking with a straight face and underneath enjoying the Alderman's discomfiture to the utmost. "You know I always carry a big cash bankroll—like the feel of it in my pocket. I can give a thousand," and to forestall any question or demur he started counting off yellow-backs and laying them on the table.

"And the second thing I want," Dave's snapping black eyes burned into the shrewd little grey ones of O'Brien, "is that you quash that indictment against me when the smoke dies away and the holler quiets down. I'm not going out in the world with that thing hanging over my head. I want your word on that."

Visions of Cramp's fate flashed across O'Brien's mind—he was no coward but Power had him morally whipped. Had he been able to avoid being cornered, he might have equivocated but personal contact was too much for him. He cleared his throat:

"Sure—I'll do that for you—the minute I can."

Dave's manner changed like a flash. He smiled—held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Alderman, I probably won't see you again."

"Good-bye, Power."

"Good-bye, Abe," with just the suspicion of a hidden meaning.

"Thanks."

"So long, kid," heartily, "good luck to you."

And Dave Power passed out the door busily stuffing the bills into his inside pocket.

Abe forestalled the question that hung unasked on O'Brien's lips.

"I came up here to see that he didn't do you harm. I couldn't keep him away. And you can be mighty glad you gave him the thousand," craftily certifying the debt, "and keeping your word on that indictment is gettin' rid of him cheap."

"You bet it is—at that," regardless of his waiting guests, O'Brien thought aloud, "you know I'm no coward but I am afraid of that Power devil. I don't want him sore on me and *this* is the one time I keep my word. He's either going to make a millionaire of himself or swing by the neck 'til he is dead. One of the two—nothing in between. He's the kind that could charm the last dime out of your pocket and smile you into thankin' him for stealing the wife you love. Cold as iron and hard as the Old Boy himself. I never saw one just like him and I guess that's why he's got my goat. I never want to see one like him again either. He's the kind that'd make faces to amuse the baby kicking in its crib the while he was twistin' a knife in your heart. Surest thing you know is that I'm going to keep my promise. I was a big fool not to see

him in the first place but you know how it is. I'm glad he got in here now."

"Sure, good thing," commented Abe, and as he left via the front door he assured himself with quiet glee that this was the most amusing half-hour he had spent for years.

Dave lived not more than five blocks from the Alderman's home. He walked along with swinging, exuberant strides. His problem was solved—he was on his way—to what he knew not and cared less. But—he was free.

The landlady met him at the door with a disapproving stare and pursed her lips as she spoke.

"That young woman of yours is waiting for you in your room. Been here since eight o'clock this morning."

"Thank you," answered Dave pleasantly as he started for the stairs. So Hebe was there. He paused a moment as the acid old widow spoke again.

"I've something to say to you and now is as good a time as any."

"You want me to move? How will tomorrow morning be—or perhaps you'd prefer tonight?" Dave anticipated her request.

"Tomorrow morning will be all right. I'm sorry——" without waiting for her to finish he walked rapidly up the stairs.

Half expecting to find Hebe in tears or hysterics he flung open the door.

"Hello, Dave!" Hebe was reclining on the bed propped up with pillows, eating chocolates and reading a magazine.

"Howdy," he closed the door behind him, removed his hat and coat, dropped them carelessly on the floor and seated himself in an easy chair.

"Aren't you going to kiss me?" Hebe pouted.

"Not now. Hadn't you better go home?"

"I should say not. I've been here all day, waiting for you to come home—haven't had a bite to eat except chocolates, since eight this morning and now it's nearly nine and you come in and ask me why don't I go home. You've got a lot of nerve."

Dave grinned a little. He couldn't help it. The girl looked charming as she reclined there on the bed and her mood fitted perfectly with his—as always.

In spite of the gravity of her words, her voice took on no added note of seriousness as she spoke again.

"You're certainly in an awful jam. What are you going to do? Run away?"

Was the woman clever or would flight be the obvious thing to her—Dave admitted to himself that he could not tell—Hebe puzzled him often like this. Why not tell her the truth?

"Yes, I'm going to get out."

"When?"

"Pretty soon."

"Take me with you?" and she munched unconcernedly on a large chocolate—the last in the box.

It was not exactly a new thought to Dave but up to the moment he had not considered it seriously. Why not? He shot a sudden test at her.

"I'm going to have a hard time taking myself. May have to go on the tramp."

"I think not." Hebe turned suddenly serious and a little light sprang into her eyes.

"Why?" he asked.

And the smouldering thing inside of her, that some call love, blazed into the open for a moment as she spoke:

"Because I can get enough for the furniture in my flat to take us out of town and keep us from starving for a while."

Dave looked at her contemplatively. The girl was a good pal, sure enough. Certainly he'd take her. When he spoke, his voice had a little warm ring to it that Hebe felt and liked.

"I was joking. I've got enough money to take care of us for a little while, anyway. And you won't have time to sell your furniture if you're going with me for I'm leaving tonight."

"All right." The crisis past, Hebe settled back into normal again and helped herself to the last bit of candy. "The instalment house I bought from can help themselves."

She arose from the bed, smoothing down her wrinkled skirts.

"What are we going to do?"

"Travel," he replied laconically.

"Where to?"

"To towns where there are Chinese laundries," he replied quizzically.

"I understand perfectly—clear as black ink. Now, that's all settled, how about that kiss you turned down a while ago?"

And so it was all settled—to the satisfaction of everybody concerned with the possible exception of

Pozinski and the Citizens' Committee—but then they didn't count. And in going away together, Dave and Hebe departed in much the same spirit as you might meet a friend and stroll down the street. Where Convention is unknown, there is no fear of Convention.

# VII

## KILLING TIME

DAVE took the stamped envelope from the bellboy's tray, dropped a coin in its place and as the youth closed the door, stared curiously at the missive he held in his hand.

"What do you think of this, Hebe? Mail—for me!"

From the depths of a velvet-cushioned chair near the window, Hebe looked up brightly, laying aside the magazine she had been reading.

"That's certainly a surprise! We haven't exactly been keeping people advised of our movements, have we, dearie?"

Dave laughed shortly, still looking at the envelope.

"Hardly. I wonder who this is from. There isn't a soul in the world knows where I am, except Abe Kelm, and I haven't heard a word from him since we left Chicago six months ago."

A sudden thought struck Hebe; her curiosity brought her to his side. "Let's find out who it's from," she said, "let me open it."

In silence Dave watched her read the communication.

"Well," she said, looking up, "here's the best news you've had in half a year." Some impulse struck her and as she held the letter in front of

his eyes, she dropped to her knees and held him tight to her.

Slowly he read:

MR. DAVID POWER,
Care Hotel St. Charles,
New Orleans, La.

Dear Sir:

It might interest you to know that the graft charge against a very dear friend of yours has been dropped on account of insufficient evidence. Also the indictment quashed.

Yours truly,
A. K.

P. S.: You might tell that friend of yours, if you ever see him, that when he is hiding out, it is always a good idea to change his name. There is such a thing as having too much nerve. How are you?

Dave made no move to take the letter from the girl's hand. Like a man in a daze, he looked at the window, his mind far away.

"That makes things awful different for us, doesn't it, dearie?" the woman asked tenderly. "What are you thinking of anyway?"

"I was just wondering," Dave spoke with an abstracted air, "where in the name of the seven bells, Abe Kelm ever got connected up with a typewriter."

The tension broke and they laughed—she, hysterically; and he, as heartily as a man whose mind was free. He arose and walked across the room.

"It certainly does make a difference." He reached into the dresser drawer, produced a collar case, opened it up and took out a roll of bills.

"We've been getting pretty short of money and I really didn't feel safe in working a town as big as New Orleans on account of that Chicago trouble. But now—might as well get busy."

He thumbed the bills over and counted them.

"A hundred and sixty dollars left, and we had seven hundred when we landed here. Well—if I'm going to work—tonight's the night, isn't it? It's nearly nine. 'Phone for the car, will you? Tell him to hustle right over."

As he started to leave when the arrival of the car was announced, he remarked carelessly: "Back in about an hour. Get dressed and we'll run over to the races this afternoon. I feel lucky." Her unexpected silence made him turn inquiringly.

Yes, unquestionably, Hebe was pouting.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"You know what's the matter. Aren't you going to kiss me good-bye?"

"Oh, is that all?" He smiled but failed to win a response. Seeing that she was serious, he dropped his stick and hat, walked back and repaired his oversight.

With the touch of his arms, her pettishness vanished and she bade him "good-bye" with a very real tenderness.

As he walked down the lobby of the hotel, stopping to light his cigar at the stand, Dave shook his head. "Every time I think I have Hebe where she is going to play pal, she turns square around and acts like a woman. I guess it's no use; they're all alike: you have to lie to them and kiss them and make love to them to keep them good tempered.

The big things don't count—it's the little ones that keep them happy and satisfied."

With which wise reflection, he seated himself in his car and directed the chauffeur to Chinatown, which order, without surprise or comment or question, his undersized, sandy-haired driver proceeded to carry out.

As they pulled slowly along the curb in the Oriental quarter, Dave examined the store fronts closely, searching for a sign bearing an English as well as a Chinese inscription.

Over a mass of undecipherable black chicken tracks, one establishment bore the English sign, "Ling Foo, Chinese Merchandise."

Outside indications were that here he might make himself understood; signalling his driver to stop, he alighted and stepped inside the store.

Amid a heavy atmosphere of Oriental tobacco and strange herbs, a chattering crowd of slant-eyed yellow men grew suddenly silent and stared curiously as he entered.

Dave looked around. He knew exactly what he was doing.

"Hello! Where boss?" he asked.

A sandal-shod, heavy-featured Mongolian, dressed in American fashion, detached himself from the little group and stepped forward.

"What want?"

Dave looked at him quietly. He had noted the nudge propelling him forward from the crowd and had also seen its source—a grey-goateed Chinaman in full Oriental regalia. When he spoke, his tones were contemptuous.

"You no boss! I want talkee to boss," pointing his finger at the grey one. "You come here now."

He walked slowly forward and still silent and impassive, the old Chinaman permitted himself to be led apart.

"I want hire boy." Dave lowered his voice, more as a rebuke to the curious ones in the rear than as a precaution. "We give theatre show and want China boy to stand around. I pay you five dollars to get me boy and pay boy two dollars for working two hours."

Truly the ways of the foreign devil were curious and strange. Ling Foo had not intended to condescend to speak to this man in his own tongue, but the prospective fee of five dollars stirred him to sudden life.

"What kind boy you want?"

"Big boy—old boy—grey-haired."

"I got him!" And with about as much show of curiosity as a deaf, dumb and blind man, Ling walked to a dark stairway and shrilled up it in Chinese.

As a result, another Chinaman in the due course of time made his way leisurely down the stairs and came to the front of the store.

Dave looked over the new arrival appraisingly. He was a rather large, well-fed appearing individual with small, black, beady eyes and his raiment consisted of a shabby blue blouse with trousers to match and worn-out straw sandals.

"Does he talk American?"

"No—no talk."

"All right. He'll do," and Dave suited his action to his words, "Here's a dollar for you and a dollar for him. I'll come for him at seven tonight. Then you get the other four dollars and he gets his. Sabby?"

"Yes, me sabbe. You be here seven tonight. Give me money."

And Dave yawned as he climbed back into the car and ordered it back to the hotel.

The costume Dave wore that night was rather unusual even for semi-tropic New Orleans. It consisted of white ducks, a spotless sun helmet and white shoes. And over the buttoned left breast pocket, a bright-coloured ribbon with a metal pendant completed an outfit which made him look like the attaché of some foreign legation, in a tropical climate, which was exactly the effect he intended to convey.

In spite of the warmth of the night, he donned a raincoat to partially conceal his rather unusual costume and picking up a small grip turned to leave, but suddenly remembering the event of the morning, turned and kissed the girl an ardent farewell, although he made a rather wry face at what he felt was foolishness, as he caught a glimpse of himself in the act in the dresser glass.

"Good-bye, dearie, and good luck." It was Hebe's stock phrase of parting. Without shame or embarrassment, she would use it fifty times a day if the occasion offered.

"I'll have good luck all right," he smiled confidently. "I may not win on the races or across a faro layout, but when the outcome of the game

depends on me, I always get what I go after. And you know what I'm after tonight."

She knew—knew well. During the short six months past, she had seen a miraculous red automobile and luxury undreamed of arise from, as he put it, "the game that depended upon him alone for success."

"Back to Chinatown!" ordered Dave briefly, and in a few moments the red car drew up in front of Ling Foo's establishment.

Dave smiled as he saw the attempt the merchant had made to give his odd human ware a little more respectable appearance. A black felt hat covered the boy's coiled queue and he wore a new blue blouse, stiff with starch and shiny with ironing.

"Tell him," instructed Dave as he counted out the promised money, "that all he has to do is to keep still and I'll show him what I want when the time comes."

Ling Foo translated, and the other Chinaman entered the car awkwardly but with an admirable stoicism.

# VIII

## A STEP UPWARD

LYNN HARDY, the shrewdest real estate operator of the Pacific Coast, was walking slowly down one of New Orleans's picturesque streets, cursing the evil day that forced him to this city which he could liken to nothing more pleasant than a frying pan on this sultry night.

He looked ahead of him and saw a crowd. Hardy liked crowds. In the very centre, close to the curb, was a red automobile; standing upright in it, he saw a dark, handsome youth, attired in snowy white clothes, holding by one arm a profoundly wise looking Chinaman, eyes framed by enormous horn-rimmed spectacles, and a heavy satin coat rustling as he moved.

All interest at once, heat forgotten, Hardy edged himself into the thick of the crowd around David Power's red automobile.

Turning to his Chinaman, Dave slowly and solemnly, with hands wide extended, bent his head. It was more than a mere bow—salaam is the better term. Thrice, four times he did this, then turned to the expectant crowd.

Coolly he looked around appraising his audience in one quick glance, then raising his hand for silence began to speak. In direct contrast with the usual strident tones of the street orator, Power's voice

was low but so clear and distinct that his words were easily audible even to those on the outside edges of the crowd.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you just saw an American and a Christian bow low to a heathen—a Chinaman. You probably wondered why. I'm going to tell you. You remove your hat when you enter a church as a mark of respect to the Deity and Saviour of Mankind. And for that reason—that same, identical reason—I salute Wang Kow, that is his name—with the deepest respect because," here the speaker paused and leaned forward to add emphasis to his words, "he too is—a saviour of mankind."

A deacon near the machine cleared his throat. The speaker, as if anticipating the thought, resumed. "You will realize when I explain, why even the most conscientious church member among you can take no exception to that term applied to this man—to Wang Kow."

To himself Hardy chuckled, "With a slap in the face he wakes 'em up—then their interest roused, he pats them on the back, smooths them down and goes ahead. That is what I should call clever work."

The speaker's voice never once rose over a quiet, well-modulated tone, but some compelling force made itself felt in every word.

"Before I left China—about two months ago—I personally saw Wang Kow with his own hands and his own sword, execute—kill—six men!"

He paused impressively—

"And still I repeat—he is a saviour of mankind.

This man who stands before you is one of the leaders of the Chinese Rebellion. The men he slew were assassins—paid murderers of the Royalist party. And when with his own hands he executed them, he merely meted out a full measure of justice. The Rebel cause needs money. That's why Wang Kow has come to America. Stop! You're wrong—he isn't asking charity—contributions—but he has brought with him something to exchange for your money—something that is beyond price. I mean that."

The man was holding his audience perfectly. It wasn't alone his air or appearance nor yet the interest of his words—the richly attired Chinaman was a mere background—the magnetic quality of the speaker expressed through his voice, his eyes, his manner were the things that were doing the work.

With his next words, Power gently pushed the Chinaman forward. "Consider him well, gentlemen. Wang Kow—*Doctor* Wang Kow, if you please. For countless generations his family have been physicians. For centuries his forebears have practised medicine.

"Some of us misjudge China—don't make that mistake. In science she is far ahead of the more civilized world. She is ahead of us all in medics. For instance—

"Here in America when we get sick we call the doctor to cure us.

"In China they pay their doctors to keep them from getting sick.

"Which is the better way? In the United States

a doctor's patients are all ill—in China they are all well.

"For that reason, the Chinese medical profession have devoted all of their attention to means and methods of preventing disease. And this research of theirs dates back thousands of years.

"In Dr. Wang Kow's family has been handed down from father to son, a marvellous compound called 'Ho Yeng Hok,' which translated into plain English means 'Prevent it.' This medicine has made the Wang Kow family the leading practitioners of China. Among the upper classes of the kingdom, it is universally used—it is little short of miraculous in the results it instantly gives."

Power raised his voice for the first time, "One teaspoonful of 'Preventit' taken each morning will stop—prevent—instantly head off any disease known to humanity—it makes a man or woman immune to practically everything except accidents and old age."

He stopped and looked around him.

"My statements are mere words. The results 'Preventit' produces talk for themselves. Gentlemen, you are about to witness a miracle—yes, that is the correct word."

Then for a few moments he talked in a different tenor, describing various common ailments, first in a general way, then becoming more specific in his suggestion of various symptoms and finally narrowing his attentions down to certain individuals in the audience.

Hardy gasped. It was the most daring exhibition of bold trickery he had ever witnessed. We all know that a man in perfectly good health and spirits

can be made to fear coming ills by the apparently sincere suggestion of a friend that he should see a doctor. In a broader and more direct way, David Power was using this principle of negative suggestion and using it with exceeding good effect.

"Do any among you feel the pains and aches that foretell approaching illness?"

With the direct question, the "man from China" centred on a few individuals who had proved more than usually susceptible to his negative suggestion, and gained their admissions that approaching disease seemed to be signalling its coming. Two of these soon-to-be invalids were brought to the running board of the car.

"Cappers—accomplices," thought Hardy to himself, but as he looked closely he perceived that one of the men was a clerk he had noticed in the Picayune Bank that afternoon, and it was hardly likely that a medicine man's aide would be occupying a responsible position in a financial institution. He watched closely.

Power was speaking to the bank clerk.

"Step up here in the car, please," and he gently but firmly guided the youth into the tonneau. Then with an extremely professional manner, Dave produced a large bottle with a Chinese label and carefully measured several drops into a glass graduate.

Holding the graduate in one hand he addressed the first "patient."

"Your name, please?"

"Harrison."

"Business?"

"I'm a bank clerk."

Hardy noted the answer. His memory had not played him false.

"Have you ever seen me before?"

"No sir."

"You are subject to malaria—for several days you have felt an attack coming on—your joints ache—your head is dull—right?"

"Yes sir, my head is kind of——"

"No matter. We all know the symptoms." Dave leaned forward, his eyes burning into the very soul of his listener. "This liquid is tasteless—I want you to drink it slowly. The second it reaches your stomach, you are going to be cured—your aches and pains are going to disappear—you are going to feel like a new man. Drink it—slowly."

Under Dave's compelling eye, the clerk absorbed his free dose of the miracle-working "Preventit." As he removed the graduate from his lips, his eyes met the other man's and he straightened up in a surprised sort of way—shook himself—then fairly sputtered, the words coming in a stream: "It worked! Just like you said. It's magic. I feel wonderful! I'm all right! I want a bottle of that. My wife——"

The white-coated man looked meaningly at the crowd before he spoke: "There are a few more patients waiting, Mr. Harrison. Before I start selling I am going to prove beyond question that 'Ho Yeng Hok' more than fulfils my promises."

The remaining "sufferers" were quickly and effectively disposed of in much the same manner as the first. The "miracle" stage once passed, the

sordid matter of exchanging the mysterious bottles for cold, hard dollars began. Business was transacted as rapidly as the bottles could be handed out. Hardy estimated that fully ninety bottles were sold at one dollar each.

The real estate man was astounded. The whole affair had been only a matter of minutes, and it was the most effectively executed thing he had ever witnessed. It certainly took ability of an unusual kind to get money on that scheme. Fascinated, he remained until the last man had disappeared and the street was empty; then he stepped to the side of the car and said impulsively:

"I'd like to have a little talk with you."

Dave shrewdly appraised the speaker as he answered, "Yes—certainly. What about?"

"About a position—a job." Hardy looked for the effect of his words, but saw none. "Would you consider anything?"

"That depends," said Dave slowly, "on two things. First, who you are, and second, what your job may be."

Hardy extended a card, remarking: "I operate in Coast real estate—big stuff—you may have heard of our Pleasant Valley orchards—we've advertised them all over the country."

Dave had seen the full-page magazine advertisements of the land project and his manner was perceptibly more cordial when he next spoke. "Oh yes, I've read something about that. Well—what have you got? Do you want to talk about it here—or where? I'm ready to listen."

Hardy noted Power's poise and manner. Warily

and keenly both men appraised each other, as the real estate man answered:

"If you can find the time, I'd like very much to have you drop up to my rooms at the St. Charles, where we can talk privately. When can you come?"

Dave answered promptly.

"Right this minute, if you like. Jump in and we'll run you up—that is," a smile tinged just the least little bit with sarcasm curled his lips, "if you're not afraid your friends might see you riding in the 'doctor's office'."

The only answer Hardy made was to climb into the machine.

Half way to the hotel, the car stopped. Dave stripped the satin coat, beaded cap and horn glasses from the Chinaman, handed him a greenback and with a ridiculous little bobbing bow, the wise Dr. Wang Kow, again transformed into a shabby coolie, stepped down into the street and was gone.

Hardy smiled. "Where in the world did you ever get the idea of this medicine scheme? It's a wonder."

"A Chinese cook, who was the biggest liar I ever knew, furnished the idea; and necessity put it to work," replied Dave easily.

As the two men entered the St. Charles Hotel, Dave stepped into the elevator without taking the trouble to enlighten Hardy as to the fact that he, too, was a guest at the same hostelry.

The real estate man occupied a luxurious suite on the fifth floor. Unimpressed, Power removed his overcoat, lighted a cigarette and waited for his host to start the conversation.

After a slight pause, Hardy took the lead:

"Let me see, I guess I have forgotten your name, Mr.——?"

"You haven't forgotten. You never heard it—my name is Power—David Power."

"Oh yes—Mr. Power; you may wonder at my asking you up here to discuss a position on such short acquaintance. But my proceeding is hardly more unconventional than the work you are doing, so I presume we may call it quits.

"Just as a preface. Out on the Pacific Coast, they rate me as one of their largest operators in real estate. For years my concern has bought great land tracts, divided them into small farms, put the raw land under cultivation and then—sold the small parcels to individuals. Understand?"

Dave nodded.

"We sell these farms—orchards happen to be our present proposition—on a 'little cash down—the rest when you have it' basis. Our wares require selling—good selling. If it was otherwise, we'd do business by mail and I shouldn't be interested in you." The real estate man looked shrewdly at the other. "I think you can sell—I'm ready to employ you as a salesman right now."

"Very kind, I'm sure. How much money can I make? That's the thing I'm interested in."

The man from Los Angeles looked at him appraisingly.

"My men, every one of them, make exactly what they earn. Their commissions range from twelve hundred dollars a year to as high as seven thousand. What you can make depends solely upon yourself—

upon what you can do. And my judgment, if it's good for anything, is that you're thoroughly capable —as good as any man I now have working for me."

"One more question," Dave spoke quickly, "how much experience and what kind does a man need to make good with you? What does he have to know?"

"Give me an idea what you have done and I'll see how it fits in with our requirements." Hardy's seemingly natural suggestion really cloaked a shrewd attempt at prying into a past he hesitated to ask about openly. Dave parried.

"You asked me here. Consequently I don't feel called upon to answer any questions. Tell me what qualifications a man must have to hit your high mark—to get in your seven thousand dollar class. Then I'll tell you whether or not I'll do. And believe me, I'm better qualified to decide than you are, for I know myself through and through."

Realizing that the affair had come to an issue, Hardy lowered his guard and showed what was really in his mind.

"Good enough. Here goes. Just two qualifications are essential: the first and most important, to be able to influence men and women, to make them do as you wish; the second—work—work—and then some more work. These two things will make seven—yes, ten thousand dollars a year for the man who goes out as my salesman."

Dave arose and walked to the window. Seven thousand a year—through legitimate business channels! It was almost unbelievable. Why, there actually seemed to be more money in straight busi-

ness than in graft! He didn't disbelieve or doubt Hardy—the man had no motive in lying. Through the advertising of his projects and chance comments heard here and there, Dave was absolutely certain that he stood in the presence of a man who could fully validate every statement he had made. He faced around and looked Hardy in the eye.

"Seven thousand sounds good to me. You say you want men who can influence others. That one thing I've been doing ever since I've been old enough to walk almost. I've had to. So far as work is concerned, don't worry, I'll work. But you've got a selling proposition—you want a salesman; I'll tell you frankly that in the ordinary sense of the word, I've never 'sold' anything in my life."

Hardy's rejoinder came right on the heels of Dave's statement.

"Doesn't make any difference."

"All right; you're the judge of that. Now—why are you offering me—a man you know nothing about—a man who for all you know may be a thief or a crook—a man whom you first saw selling quack medicine to a street corner crowd—tell me, why are you, a presumably legitimate business man with a national reputation, offering that street corner fakir a position?"

"You want an answer to that question and I'm going to give you one." Hardy was tense and earnest. "In the first place, I don't care who or what a man is or has been if he can and will sell my stuff. That last fellow I hired was a barber who shaved me at the Cadillac in Detroit. He talked so well that he interested me. I rebuffed and

contradicted him; he showed so much resource and ingenuity that I knew he could sell. I hired him. Today he is making a hundred a week instead of scraping chins for ten cent tips. Another chap was chauffeur for a man in Chicago—but never mind specific examples, the thing I want to impress upon you is that a man's future is the only thing that interests me and I am particularly adept at predicting what a man can or can't do in my employ. On the strength of these two facts, I am offering you a place.

"Look here, Power: thirty years ago I was selling real estate for a big Los Angeles house. The day I cast my first vote, I quit my job and went in business for myself—total capital, the contents of my head; and to put into operation the plans I had in mind, I had to have cash, lots of it. I found a printer who needed work and secured credit. I 'sold' that printer on the idea that I would pay my bills. On his old, stone proving plate, with a piece of pencil and a scrap of print paper, I outlined what I wanted. After he got through I had five hundred nice, new, crinkly 'Hardy 7% Real Estate Bonds': denomination $100. each; cash value—zero.

"I went out and sold those 'Bonds'—a twenty-one year old boy selling worthless pieces of paper at $100. each—and collecting for them. Imagine! Inside of ninety days, I had fifty thousand in cash and the dear public had my 'bonds.'

"I had sense enough, under the advice of the best lawyer in town, to invest the cash in property, options and development, and by the time folks

woke up and began to wonder what was back of those 'bonds' they'd bought, there was a full one hundred cents' worth of security for every dollar invested.

"That started me. I was able to 'sell' myself into a business of my own. And ever since, my operations have been based on salesmanship—making the other man want what I have.

"Lots of operators wonder why I'm worth a million dollars when they can't raise a million cents. They say, 'We have better property than Hardy; we offer it at lower prices; why don't we get the business?' They may be right about values—I won't argue that. But while they are sitting around waiting for trade to come their way, I've got men out selling who bring business in—who *make* people take what we have irrespective of price or worth.

"You'll pardon my talking so much, but this is a subject, Mr. Power, that's very near my heart. My business happens to be land—it might just as well be hats or shoes—for the real foundation, first, last and always, is—selling the goods. I made my start by being able to sell. My business grew because I found other men who could sell and put them to work, and it's going to keep on growing because as fast as I locate them I shall continue to employ additional men who can market what I have to offer.

"Mark this. I want you only because I know that you can make money for Lynn Hardy, the fact that in so doing you can earn considerable for yourself is only incidental. And I honestly and sincerely

believe that you'll sell my land a whole lot easier than 'Dr. What's his Name's Keep Well.'"

Accustomed as he was to lightning changes in plans, quick decisions and the making of unforeseen moves, Dave saw nothing strange in the fact that his mind was already made up. He had decided to accept.

"You've made me understand a little more clearly, Mr. Hardy. How do I start?"

"I have only one basis. Ten per cent commission. You get one dollar for yourself out of every ten you bring in. In the meantime, I'll pay your living expenses until you get started."

"Sounds all right." Dave smiled as he spoke. "But then I really don't know anything about it. I'm going to warn you though—you speak of paying my expenses—I live pretty high."

"I'll stand by my bargain," said Hardy quietly. "Is it a go?"

"It is!" And Dave grasped the extended hand and bound his bargain.

"You know," said Hardy quizzically, "I'm just fool enough to believe that I can read the future and this particular 'handwriting on the wall' seems to say that we're going to make a good deal of money out of each other." Then abruptly, "Have a drink?"

"Thanks, yes," and Dave threw away his cigar. "Scotch, please. And if you're going to do the ordering tell them to send along the bottle."

Hardy reached for the 'phone and put in the order.

Discarding the small whiskey glass which came

on the tray, Dave proceeded to enlighten Hardy as to why he had called for the bottle, by substituting the water tumbler and pouring out a drink larger than any bartender in his sober senses would have sent. It was big enough and stiff enough to keel over a mule, but he tossed it off like so much water and with no more visible effect.

Hardy narrowed his eyes a trifle.

"Do you drink much, Power?" He spoke with an assumed air of carelessness.

Dave settled back easily in his chair as he replied: "Yes I do. I drink a lot—a whole lot in fact, but I don't get drunk. Why?"

"Nothing, only—I—Oh, never mind. I just asked to make talk." Hardy's air was that of a man dismissing an unpleasant subject.

The other leaned forward and suddenly fixed his dark eyes sharply on his new employer. His voice was quiet but the words snapped and crackled as they came: "Look here, Mr. Hardy. It seems to be all settled that I'm going to work for you. So we might as well have a clean, clear understanding to start with. The only reason in the wide world that I'm making this tieup lies in the fact that it looks to me as if there might be money in it—more money than I'm making now. But if you've any moral scruples hanging around—if you expect anything from me besides a cash profit—then you'd better think again.

"I am what I am and do what I do because it pleases me. And what I do or what I am, is none of your business. When I fail to deliver what you want, we'll part company. But once and for all,

get this through your head: my habits, my tastes, my morals, my conduct, they are all under the control of one man and one man only, and that's myself."

Toward the last, Dave's tone had grown almost vicious. Hardy smiled conciliatingly. "Drink yourself to death my boy—make playmates of the worst women in Los Angeles, as many as you like or can get—do anything you please. I ask for only one thing. Since you are putting your cards on the table, here are mine—look them over. Money—and then money—that's what I'm interested in, and you in my eyes are purely and simply a means to the end of more money."

"That's a good starting point," said Dave approvingly. "What's next?"

"The sooner you start the better. I leave here at four tomorrow for Los Angeles. If you can make arrangements, why not go together?"

"Suits me," said Dave briefly, turning to the telephone and calling his own room. He waited but no answer came. Evidently Hebe was not in. He replaced the receiver.

"A friend?" questioned Hardy.

"The woman I'm travelling with," explained Dave briefly. "We're living here and she was waiting for me to come back. Got tired I suppose."

"Oh, you're married." Hardy's voice was even and suave. "I should be delighted to meet your wife."

For a moment Dave hesitated, then some perverse whim struck him full in the face and his four-word answer came as cold as ice.

"I have no wife," he said.

# IX

## THE STATUS OF HEBE

AS the train drew into the Los Angeles station four hours late, the hissing of the steam exhaust sounded like a giant sigh of relief to Hebe. It was an exact reflection of her own feelings. The doors opened and an avalanche of luggage shot forth into the hands of the waiting red caps.

Their hand baggage was already well on its way to the taxi stand by the time Hardy had alighted and Dave had helped Hebe down. Her feet once planted on terra firma, she petulantly shook her arm free from his grip and walked down the platform apart from her two companions, who oblivious to her signs of displeasure, continued deep in conversation.

Never in her short life had Hebe Norse suffered so complete an eclipse. From the time they had boarded the Coast train at New Orleans, the two men had talked real estate to the exclusion of all other subjects. She had been completely and almost rudely ignored. When she had tried to turn the conversation in more pleasant and entertaining channels, she had been shut off with an abruptness that bordered on rebuke.

She vowed to make Dave pay dearly. And her white teeth snapped together on the determination.

Hardy and Dave were still talking orchards as they waited for a taxicab. Hebe glanced around. Hardy, listening to Dave, unconsciously followed her look. As his eye fell on a well but somewhat flashily dressed man standing near the curb, he came back to consciousness and nodded pleasantly.

"Howdy, Crane!" The words were automatic—what Dave was saying interested him exceedingly.

"Hello!" The other returned the greeting carelessly, but as he looked over, his eyes met the big, blue orbs that Hebe flashed in his direction.

With a word to his porter, Crane walked leisurely over to the group and smilingly took the real estate man by the arm to attract his attention.

"Hardy, I'm glad to see you. Beastly nuisance that they don't keep enough cars here to handle the crowd, isn't it?"

"Why, ah—eh—yes, it is that." Hardy was surprised that the other should go out of his way to exchange greetings.

"If I'd had a little foresight, my car would have been down to meet me and I'd a given you all a 'lift.'" Still smiling pleasantly, Crane looked meaningly at Hebe. Then Hardy fully awakened, understood why he was there and with a sarcastic smile introduced him.

"Mrs. Power, may I present Mr. Crane—Mr. Clayton Crane?"

Even as she graciously acknowledged the introduction, Hebe knew that Lynn Hardy had intercepted the surreptitious glances that had passed between her and Crane and hated him for the slight

ironical inflection of his tone. Dave had slighted her. Well, she'd make him pay. So when Crane tendered an entirely unnecessary handclasp she in turn put a little extra warmth into the pressure of her own palm. On her guard against long days of ennui, with Dave up to his ears in the new project, she quickly appraised the man who stood before her, his rich clothing, his rings, his general air of well being, and in that instant she felt a glow of satisfaction, for she knew that she had acquired an amusement resource worth possessing. He was speaking:

"Are you to be in Los Angeles long, Mrs. Power?" Crane's voice was urbane and smooth and already he had begun to ignore the two men; in fact, had almost turned his back upon them. This would never do, for if Dave became offended he would be just as likely as not to pitch the stout man into the street. She adjusted the situation before it became strained.

"We expect to make our home here. I want you to meet Mr. Power."

She stole a glance at Hardy. Around the corners of his mouth, little hollows showed amusement at her deft avoidance of the word, "husband."

"May I be permitted to congratulate the husband of the charming Mrs. Power?" Hardy was openly grinning. The only one in the crowd who felt really at ease was David. He answered composedly:

"You may be permitted to do so, certainly."

"Well, it's good news that you people are going to live here." A taxi was pulling up and Crane was

finished enough not to drag the thing out too far. "We've always room for good folks here, in Los Angeles, and I hope to see you again. Good-bye, Hardy."

And with his last words the door of the cab slammed behind him and the car wheeled rapidly away from the curb.

Hardy's smile faded as he turned to the cab starter.

"Wasn't that our taxi?" he inquired.

"Yes sir, but he got in so quick I didn't have a chance to tell him, and anyway, you were all together and I thought—"

"Never mind what you thought," Hardy snapped. "Here comes another cab. We'll take it."

"Is Mr. Crane in business here?" asked Hebe, her tone innocently curious.

"Yes, he's in the oil business—made a lot of money, they say. By the way, he lives down at the Alexandria Hotel where I'm taking you people and if you want my advice, keep away from him."

"Why?" Hebe evidently was surprised at the warning.

"Because, he's dangerous for women to fool with. That's why."

Hardy turned to Dave and hurriedly changed the subject.

"See you tomorrow morning at eight o'clock at the office," he said as the doorman of the Alexandria helped the couple alight.

"All right," laughed Dave.

Neither Power nor Hebe had seen Clayton Crane

in the dining room. Hebe was genuinely surprised and pleased by his hearty "Well, well, we meet again!" as they were walking out. The orchestra was playing and it was a good one. Always fond of music, Dave willingly consented to an evening of loitering and listening and between the violins and his thoughts became an abstracted audience ideally suited to the wishes of his companions.

Crane was suave, polished and had the finish born of long and varied experience in affairs of this kind. Mindful of the conventions, he at first included Dave in enough of the conversation to avoid a possibility of offence. But seeing the other's abstraction, bit by bit he let the talk drift into what amounted to a whispered *tête-à-tête* between Hebe and himself.

Always unusually attractive, the girl was at her best this evening. She exercised every art and wile within her to fascinate and draw the "oil man" and he was a willing victim.

Wise as the wizards of old, Hebe abruptly terminated the evening before its novelty began to pall.

"Mr. Crane, I'm terribly worn out with my trip; I think I'll retire. Good-night."

Crane stood up. He was surprised; the hour was early, but she was evidently in earnest.

"I'm awfully glad to have seen you and I hope you spend as refreshing a night as I have an evening. Would you people care to take a drive with me tomorrow afternoon and see something of the town?" He smiled winningly. "I'm a good deal of a loafer, you know, with lots of time on my hands

and I'm just selfish enough to want to see more of you folks."

"Dave couldn't go," Hebe flashed back. "You see, he's a workingman and has to make the money for me to spend. But if that invitation is one-half mine, 'phone me about eleven and I'll see what my half feels like. Good-night."

As the elevator arose to their floor, Hebe reflected brightly that she had terminated the evening at the proper moment, for Crane's inflamed imagination to build better in her absence than she could in person. As they entered their rooms, Dave half threw himself on a couch and closed his eyes. Liquor never affected his brain but music always could and did—at the moment he was half intoxicated with the languor and voluptuousness of the soft strains that had held him in their spell all evening. Hebe, her mouth full of hair pins, interrupted his reveries.

"Nice man, Mr. Crane, isn't he?" She removed the pins and shook out her glistening tresses.

"Yes, I guess so," his answer was almost mechanical.

"You don't mind if I go riding with him tomorrow, do you?" The seemingly innocent and dutiful words brought Dave out of his trance. He sat bolt upright and lit a cigar before he spoke. His voice was soft but the words came clear as a bell.

"This afternoon, Hebe, you were introduced as my wife to this man. That's happened before and it hasn't amounted to anything. But things have changed. I intend to live in this town and I've brought you with me. Lots of people are going to

know you as my wife and for that reason and that reason alone, you've got to behave yourself. Understand?"

"Why Dave!" Hebe's air was injured. "I'm surprised at your saying a thing like that. What do you mean anyway?"

"You ask me what I mean. I think you already know, but for the sake of avoiding misunderstandings, I'm going to tell you. Don't do anything which might put me in a bad business light. That's all! Just bear that in mind and we'll get along fine.

"Since we left Chicago, we've been together practically day and night. Don't think for a moment, girl, that I don't know you like a book. You realize that from now on, with me working steadily in a legitimate business, you're going to have a lot of time to kill—and you saw your first chance in Crane."

Hebe stared. It was no use trying to deceive Dave. She might have known it. He was talking again.

"Hardy says that this Crane is a dangerous man for a woman to play with—he might be for most women—but not for you. If I were an uninterested bystander, knowing what I do, I should say that you are a dangerous woman for him to play with, but that's neither here nor there. The time to have an understanding is before any damage is done, so I repeat: go ahead, amuse yourself with this fellow, but use your head, and remember that if you do anything that injures me in a business way, you'll suffer for it and suffer like hell."

"Don't you know I love you, Dave?" Woman's weapons were out at last and Hebe hung on Dave's neck. Without attempting to remove her arms he looked down at her and grinned.

"No! I think you love yourself first; money, second; and then maybe you *like* me—not love—*like*. Get it?" and he smiled again.

Hebe released him and laughed too.

"The same to you, old boy. Give me a cigarette, and I'll promise that if I can't be good, I'll at least be careful."

She disappeared into the bedroom, leaving a trail of scented smoke behind her. The incident closed and forgotten, the music spell returned and Dave lay on the couch dreaming and looking out the window at silver stars against a background of purple sky. It was three in the morning before he retired.

Hebe wakened and sat up sleepily rubbing her eyes. "What time is it?" dazedly and then suddenly recalling something, "Dave I want to ask you a question."

"Ask away"—in the dark his face bore an amused expression.

"Admitting that we don't love each other and that really underneath everything we're both pretty cold-blooded, how do you account for the fact that we were so strongly attached to each other at first?"

Dave thought a moment before he answered.

"You've said we are both pretty cold-blooded, so I guess I'm privileged to say that we are also clever people as the world goes. Now, back of cleverness is always a burning curiosity about everything and anything. So, being clever, we are both burdened

with an extra share of curiosity. Ninety-nine per cent of the men you meet are the same old story—all alike; I happen to be a little different—a little harder to read. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, go ahead, you sound like a book."

"Most women, Hebe, are identically alike—old stories—but you are different. When we met, we two, clever, curiosity-ridden mortals, found each other difficult to understand, hard to figure out, and consequently we were attracted to each other; our curiosity did the job."

"Curiosity—that's a funny name for love"; she paused, "but I really believe it does fit our case."

"And since you've started the subject, I don't mind admitting to you that I believe you've arrived at the stage where you *do* understand me, where your curiosity is satisfied and I'm frank to say that for my part I can almost tell what you're going to do before you do it."

"Dave," Hebe's voice was smooth and even, "now that the novelty has worn off—now that we understand each other, how do you account for our still being together?"

"When I first smoked a cigar and a cigarette, I enjoyed them. Now I've been smoking for years, I can't tell you whether my cigar is lit or not. I don't smoke because I enjoy it; it's become a habit, and that's what's happening to us—we're becoming 'habits' to each other."

Hebe reached over in the dark and took him by the arm. "Dave you know a child is first attracted by and then gets in the habit of playing with old toys, but what happens when new ones appear?"

"I admitted a while ago you were clever Hebe; you don't have to prove it. Answer your own question. If the new toys are more interesting than the old ones, on with the new, off with the old. I'm going to stop talking and do a little sleeping. Good-night."

# X

## SELLING A SALESMAN

THE offices of the Hardy Real Estate Company were located in the Sutter National Bank Building. David Power turned the knob of the entrance door at five minutes past eight o'clock.

A pleasant face appeared around the corner of a mahogany telephone switchboard.

"Morning, whom do you want to see?"

"Mr. Hardy."

"Regarding what, please?"

"I'm Mr. Power, a new salesman."

"Mr. Hardy isn't down yet, but we're expecting him any minute. Won't you step into the salesmen's room and wait?"

A youth appeared and led Dave into a large corner office, with desks down one side of it and enormous plats of the Hardy projects on the walls, where he waited impatiently for almost an hour before the boy appeared again to announce that Hardy had arrived. He followed the boy into a private office that was nothing short of magnificent. High mahogany panels wainscoted the walls. Wrought iron candelabra dotted the sides; in front of an Italian marble fireplace stood a priceless blue and yellow Chinese rug; a carved desk that bore the mark of master craftsmanship centred the room.

And from the back of the desk rose Hardy, still

attired in the same baggy suit he had worn the day previous. He greeted Dave with a rather wan smile.

"Glad to see you, Power!" In spite of the cordial note, his voice was a little weary. "Sorry I kept you waiting, but I didn't get to sleep until five this morning, and when I finally did doze off I overdid things a little. How are you feeling?"

"Fit and fine." Dave glanced around as he spoke, noting the heavy velvet drapes at the window and the massive bronze fittings on the plate-glassed desk top.

Three postal cards lay in front of Hardy. He carefully adjusted his heavy horn-rimmed glasses and looked them over, then glancing up, shuffled them like playing cards as he spoke.

"Our advertising makes people write in from all over the States, Power. We first send these folks literature and try to get their contracts for Pleasant Valley farms through the mails. If we are unable to do this after a certain length of time—one month, to be exact—we turn them over to our salesmen to work on. These inquiries are the basis of our personal representatives' work. I have had my secretary select three postal requests for information sent up by people here in Los Angeles, right in town where we can get at them handily. My car is downstairs; if you're ready, we'll just shoot out and see what we can do in the way of turning these postal cards into cash money."

The first address proved to be a tumble-down cottage in the negro quarter. Hardy, making no move to alight, turned to his companion questioningly.

"From the looks of the house it doesn't seem as if we had very much chance of selling these people anything, does it?" His voice showed no motive behind the question.

"You never can tell," answered Dave briskly, alighting. "I've seen tramps with five hundred dollars in their shoes and well-dressed gentlemen without five cents in their pockets. I'm past the stage where I judge by appearances."

Inwardly Hardy smiled with gratification. One of the big things he ground into his men was the fact that anyone who had a little money and an income, no matter how poor or how unpromising they seemed from outside appearance, might be induced to purchase and the only way to find out whether they could and would buy was to make the trial. In spite of his work in this direction, however, he had found it a general tendency among his men to pre-judge prospective purchasers on the strength of outward appearance. Consequently Dave's remark and attitude won his unqualified approbation.

"Probably negroes," he commented as they climbed the steps, "but they're all right. We've set aside a solid section for them. Sold them quite a few small farms and make it a talking point to white people as a source of servants and labour."

A pull on the cracked white knob of the doorbell produced no sound so they rapped smartly at the pine door. After an interval it opened and a large, fat negress appeared, wiping wet hands on a soiled apron. She looked at the two well-dressed white men in surprise. Hardy was the first to speak.

"Good-morning; I am Mr. Hardy of the Hardy

Land Syndicates and this is Mr. Power of our company. You wrote for particulars of Pleasant Valley farms—may we step in for a moment?"

At that instant a racking cough made itself heard; the negro woman involuntarily glanced behind her; then with a worried look she recalled herself and extended the hospitality of her tumble-down, dilapidated dwelling.

"Sho, sho, step right in, gen'men; make you'selves to home."

As the two men walked into the dingy hall, Dave noted through the open door that in the darkened front room which served as a bedchamber, the huddled form of a boy about sixteen, restlessly tossing under a tattered, soiled, old comforter. The general odour about the house was suggestive of filth and sickness and smote even upon Dave's not too sensitive nostrils as decidedly unpleasant.

There, in the half darkness, his words punctuated by the terrible coughs of the invalid, Hardy started to sell the woman. His talk was smooth and convincing. Dave marvelled at the way he handled language but kept a keen, appraising eye on the woman and the entire situation. Less than five minutes had elapsed, when with an apology to Hardy for interrupting, he spoke, addressing the negress directly.

"Mammy, are you married?"

"No, suh, A'hm a widda woman, sah."

"How long has your husband been dead?"

"Fahve yeahs, sah."

"How do you make a living?"

"Ah wash, sah."

"For whom do you wash?" Dave's manner was as considerate and courteous as if he were addressing the first lady of the land.

"Fer Missus Potta—and—"

"Just a moment, Mammy; is Mr. Potter a rich man?"

"Oh, yassa,—he live in that big house down on Columbine Avenue—he gotta big cah—yassa, he's rich, all right."

"Now, Mammy, listen to me!"

"Yassa."

"If Mr. Potter should tell you that he would give you back a thousand dollars in cash if you loaned him twenty-five dollars for a week, would you believe him?"

"Yassa, he do what he say."

"All right, and if he told you that, would you give him the twenty-five dollars—give *him,* not me, Mammy?"

Again the sound of the terrible cough brought a worried look to the mother's face but she straightened up bravely.

"No, sah, Ah wouldn't."

"Why not?"

"Because Ah haven't had five dollahs, let alone twenty-five for yeahs and yeahs—"

"Thanks, Mammy." He turned inquiringly to Hardy, who had taken in the situation. "Shall we go?"

For answer Hardy turned his back and passed out the door. Dave lingered.

"What's the matter with him?" he asked, nodding toward the bedroom.

"I don't know, suh, he sho is a sick boy."

"Haven't you had a doctor?"

"No, sah, got no money, Ah've been waitin' till Saturday so I'll get paid. The docta down heah don't give no tick; it's cash with him."

Dave looked ruminatively at the woman's black, seamed face, then he reached in his pocket, pulled out a five-dollar bill and dropped it in her apron.

"Good-bye, Mammy," he smiled, closing the door behind him, and almost ran to the limousine to avoid a possible embarrassment of thanks.

"Better luck on the next one," said Dave as Hardy called the address and the car started away.

"I hope so," rejoined the other, then suddenly. "Power, why were you so long coming out?" Then suddenly and keenly: "What did you do—give her money for that sick 'nigger'?"

"Yes, I did," Dave answered calmly.

Hardy was distinctly displeased. He looked out of the window and then turned back to his new salesman.

"You're too softhearted. If you expect to go through this world alleviating all the suffering you encounter, you might as well make up your mind to end life needing help yourself. Conserve your money. This is a survival of the fittest."

"You think so, do you?" Dave's voice was harsh, his lips tightly compressed. He resented Hardy's interference in his affairs. "You mix a little truth with a lot of nonsense and then expect me to accept it. Bosh! In the first place, if you think I'm too softhearted, I advise you to shelve that judgment and reserve your decision until *you* and *I*

have occasion to settle something. Then I'll wager you'll change your mind.

"I certainly don't intend to go through life as a philanthropist, but I'll gladly pay five dollars any time for information that may be worth thousands to me, and that's why I gave that woman money for her kid."

Surprised, Hardy glanced at his companion, "Information, why—all she told you was that she didn't have the money to buy with. Wasn't it?"

"No, that wasn't all. The experience with her taught me that the first thing to do in selling this stuff is to find out whether or not the person you're talking to has the money to buy. It didn't occur to me until she brought it home. That first experience is going to save me a lot of waste time and a lot of waste breath. It's worth fifty dollars, because it's going to make me money where I'd otherwise squander valuable time. Now do you understand?"

"Well, partially." Keen as he was, Hardy's mind could not keep pace with Dave's and he mentally revolved the question several times before the light dawned on him. "Say, Power, that's a good point—the first thing to do is to find out whether they have the means to buy before you try to make them want it. That's good, sound sense. If you hadn't cut in, I would have gone right ahead and given her the whole sales talk before I tried to get her order and found that she didn't have any money."

"That's why I interrupted you," said Dave quietly. "I'm in a hurry to make some money today and I didn't want to waste time."

The car drew up in front of a little shop, built on

what was formerly a two-story frame dwelling. A sign bore the words in gold letters, "Jerry Keegan, Plumber and Steamfitter."

Hardy glanced down at the card he held in his hand and commented, "Guess we don't have to worry about money here. The office made a note on this card that Bradstreet's rate this fellow at two thousand five hundred dollars, good credit. He can buy all right if we make him want to."

A bell jangled noisily as they opened the door into the dark, little shop. A man whistling in the back part ceased his labours and came cheerfully forward.

"Good-morning, gents. What can I do for you?" he asked briskly.

Hardy answered.

"I am Mr. Hardy and this is Mr. Power of the Hardy Real Estate Syndicates. You wrote us regarding our Pleasant Valley apple orchards."

The plumber's smile departed and a suspicious look replaced it. These men, instead of being customers, had something to sell him; his well-dressed visitors were there to take money, not leave it. However, he did not want to be discourteous in spite of the fact that he was busy.

"I guess you want to see my wife. We don't want no farm, but I'll let you talk to her."

After a short interval, a stout, red-faced, good-natured looking woman appeared, with a little girl about five years old toddling along at her skirt. Dave thought to himself that he had never seen a more beautiful child.

Hardy stepped forward and removed his hat.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Keegan. I am Mr. Hardy —you wrote us about our Pleasant Valley farms. I came in to see what you had decided."

"Oh, yis—I wrote in to ye, but we don't want anny." Her slight brogue sounded pleasantly in Dave's ears—her voice was in distinct contrast to her general appearance, full and melodious.

"I'm certainly not here to urge you to buy," Hardy smiled winningly as he spoke, "but there are a few facts not set forth in our printed matter that you should be in possession of before you really make up your mind one way or the other.

"This is a ten-million-dollar project and there is a real fortune in it for every man and woman who purchases one of these orchard tracts. It's the biggest thing ever launched in this country—a property that nobody has been able to buy for the last fifty years."

Pulling out a map from his pocket, Hardy spread it flat and launched into a talk about the enormous profits to be derived from the growing of apples on his lands. He offered government figures which proved that apple consumption and demand far exceeded the available supply. He set forth the costs of growing the fruit and the selling prices, painting skilfully a glowing profit picture. He talked well and forcefully—into his every word went punch and personality. No wonder the man exhausted himself, thought Dave—working this way a giant would burn out in no time at all. But his audience, while respectful and silent, were unresponsive. Dave seated himself near the window and smiled at the golden-haired child. Finally Hardy summed up

all of his arguments and points in a grand effort to secure their contract. But the answer came so decisively that he was forced to accept it.

"No, sor," the woman was speaking; Dave noted that she did not even glance at her husband. It was evident that she wore the pants. "It's verry kind of you to tell us all this, but we don't want it!"

Hardy accepted defeat with a graceful smile and turned to the door but as he saw the child on Dave's knee, he frowned. The pupil was not paying attention enough to the master. As he put his hand on the latch, Dave spoke.

"Just a minute, please, Mr. Hardy!" He turned to the parents. "If you people don't mind, I'm going to sit here a moment longer. I'm crazy about children and Norah is a treat to me. (Already he had learned the child's name.) I have a friend in Chicago whose little girl looks enough like Norah to be her twin and she's the smartest kid I've ever seen."

"Oh, sor, so is Norah." The farms forgotten, the mother rose to Dave's bait and started recounting the proof of her offspring's precocity. Soon Jerry himself joined in and to Hardy's disgust, the whole affair turned into a family session on the virtues of the child.

Deftly Dave turned the conversation into a discussion of little Norah's future and to Hardy's amazement, all antagonism forgotten, father and mother, principally the latter, were interestedly engaged in a discussion of the rejected apple farms as a future source of independence for the child.

Dave rose, setting the little girl down on the counter, as he pointed a finger at her and spoke.

"Norah Keegan, you're goin' to be a well-fixed young lady"; then turning to Mrs. Keegan whose face wore a beaming smile, "How about it, Mrs. Keegan?"

"That she is, Mr. Power," responded the fond mother.

"And this is what's going to make her that," commented Dave as he filled out a contract—glancing up for a moment. "I'm going to let you have this tract for three hundred dollars down and then twenty-five a month while it's being paid for. Instead of putting the twenty-five in the savings bank each month, you're going to invest it in little Norah's farm. How's that?" Satisfied with a quick glance which found approval on the face of the mother, he resumed writing up the contract without waiting for a verbal answer.

He laid the contract and the fountain pen in front of the pair and put his finger on the bottom line. It was a little delicate, because he didn't know which one would sign. But Mrs. Keegan solved his dilemma by nudging her husband.

"Sign it, Jerry," she said. "Don't you see Mr. Power is waitin'—get it fixed up; my stew is after burnin'—I can smell it. Hurry up!"

Dutifully the plumber affixed his signature and under the direction of Dave wrote out a check for three hundred dollars. Dave pocketed the contract and check but made no move to go. He grinned amiably.

"You're not goin' to get rid of me this easily,

Mrs. Keegan. That stew smells mighty fine to me and I've got an appetite I'd be ashamed to let loose around here. You know, I'm goin' to pick out a specially fine bit of land for Norah and I think the least you can do is to ask Hardy and me to have some dinner."

"God bless you, yes—we'll be awful glad to have you, won't we, Jerry?" and the excited woman fled to get out her best table-cloth and the silver knives and forks for the unexpected guests.

To his great disgust, dyspeptic Hardy was seated at the table with little Norah between him and Dave. The child made him nervous waving a greasy spoon near his face—the stew smelled terribly of onions—the dishes he feared were far from spotless; he could eat almost nothing. On the contrary, David Power, one hand alternately playing with the child and joining the other in plying a knife and fork, ate a dinner that would have foundered a ploughman, complimented Mrs. Keegan on her cooking; joked with Jerry about his appetite and poked quiet fun at his employer about his lack of it.

"Can't be rich and healthy both, you know," he laughed. "Some have meat and cannot eat and some can eat and have no meat. Where'd you hear that before, Mrs. Keegan?"

"Sure, in the ould counthry, Mr. Power, to be sure," she answered admiringly.

"Say, Mrs. Keegan, you and your husband are the kind of people we want on our farms, and I want you to give me the names of three of your good friends whom you'd like to have up there with you when the time comes. Whom would you suggest?"

Mrs. Keegan thought a moment and then looked up.

"There's Mr. Reilly and Mrs. Conover and the Caseys—and if you wanted four, I'd say the Murphys are fine folks."

"No, I can only take three," Dave spoke solemnly, "and after dinner, you can just sit yourself down and write a letter to the Reillys and the Conovers and the Caseys, telling them that you have bought an orchard for little Norah and you have told me that they were the kind of people we were looking for. Right after lunch—and I'll wash the dishes for you while you're doing it."

His eyes twinkled over at her and she smiled back.

"Sure I'll do it, and you'll wash nothing, Mr. Power—cleanin' dishes is not a man's work and you're a real man, God bless you, and the divil avoid your presence."

It was two-thirty when the two men re-entered the car and the grumbling, foodless chauffeur glanced sulkily back for instructions.

Hardy pulled out his third postal card inquiry and put on his glasses.

"Let me see, this address is—"

"Put it back in your pocket, man!" Dave displayed his three envelopes addressed in Mrs. Keegan's hand to Casey, Conover and Reilly, and spread them fanwise in front of Hardy's eyes. "Keep it. We don't need it. I've got people here that we'll surely sell, and no time to waste on long chances like that postal card of yours." He turned and waved good-bye to the Keegan family who

stood in the window of the plumbing shop waving in return.

"Power," he said, "you're the damnedest man I ever saw. When I closed my solicitation and started to get out, I wouldn't have given you a dime for that sale—I dismissed it as impossible—and yet you've got a contract for twenty acres of land for two thousand dollars in your pocket and a check for three hundred to bind the bargain. It's a miracle."

"It's no miracle," rejoined Dave. "It's common sense. You were talking fortunes and investments and profits to the Keegans. What do they know about those things—you frightened them with your big talk. I sold them their little Norah."

"I understand," with a note of awe in his voice, "but you're the first man I ever saw who could sell that way. You're not selling land—you're selling people the thing that's nearest their hearts; and if you can keep it up, you'll make a fortune."

"I know it," answered Dave absently. Already his mind was with the next prospect, planning his line of approach but suddenly he came back to his surroundings with a start. "Oh, by the way, if I can keep busy, you have no objections to my working right here in Los Angeles, have you?"

"Not a bit," Hardy promptly answered. "We've made very few sales here—been using it as a training ground for new men, you know. But do you really think you can make good? We have very few inquiries from here."

"There are a lot of people here and that's all that is necessary," Dave answered. "I don't want

your inquiries. Most of these people who write in to you are curiosity seekers, anyway. I'll take every sale I make and make it make more sales for me. I'll create my own inquiries. You saw what Mrs. Keegan did for me, didn't you? Well, after I sell Reilly, he will give me three more—and Casey will do the same—and so will Conover, and after I sell the people whose names they give me—"

"Stop!" commanded Hardy, raising one hand. "I'm no fool; I understand thoroughly and completely—you've given me a brand new idea—but if I ever have to eat any more Irish stew myself to help you sell, the business can go to the dogs."

Dave smiled in quiet amusement, as the car drew up before the store of Reilly, who was a green grocer with a prosperous looking shop.

In response to the inquiry for Mr. Reilly, a small, weazened man with a rather sour look stepped to the front of the store. Dave opened the conversation and Hardy made no move to interfere.

"You're Mr. Reilly?" in a brusque and business-like tone.

"Yes, sir."

"I am Mr. Power of the Hardy Land Syndicates and this is Mr. Hardy. You have heard of our orchard projects in Pleasant Valley?"

"I have heard of them, but I want no land."

Hardy watched like a hawk to see how Dave would handle the immediate refusal. He showed no signs of disappointment and started to turn away, speaking as he did so.

"As I thought, Mr. Reilly. I told Mrs. Keegan that I did not believe you were the kind of a man

or had the kind of a family that we wanted to own our land."

"Wait a minute," exclaimed Reilly, who could hardly believe his ears. "You told Mrs. Keegan what?"

Dave explained patiently.

"I told her when she insisted that I take a letter of introduction to you—here it is, you see, I didn't think it worth while to use it," showing the letter, "that from what I had heard, I did not believe we would care to sell you land. I came down to see you only because she insisted. We have let the Keegans have twenty acres of our tract. They are the *right* kind of people, you see."

"I'm as good as the Keegans anny day."

"That is a matter of opinion, Mr. Reilly. They seem to think so, but as far as I'm concerned, it remains to be proven," Dave's voice was icy cold.

"For everry dollar they've got, I've got two. If they're able to buy twenty acres I could buy forty, if I wanted to."

Every clerk in the store was listening to the proprietor whose raised voice shrilled out excitedly.

"It isn't a question of money, Mr. Reilly—of ability to pay; we demand other things from our land-owners." Dave's tone was bland and oily.

"What are those things? If the Keegans are good enough for your land, I'm good enough too. What are those other things?"

The psychological moment had arrived. Dave smoothly and suavely took the irate Irishman by the arm and led him into a situation where he was excitedly trying to prove that he could measure up

to any qualifications desired. And finally—suddenly—Dave produced the contract and before he had time to cool, his signature was on the dotted line and the ink was blotted. Then Dave looked at him.

"Mr. Keegan gave me a check for three hundred dollars as a first payment. Probably you can't afford to give me that much, so I'll let you off at two hundred."

"Can't afford it, is it?" and Reilly rushed behind the cashier's cage and grabbed a checkbook. "I'll show you what I can afford. Mr. Power, I'm giving you five hundred down. Write me out a receipt for that amount."

Calmly Dave complied, pocketed contract and check and left the store with Hardy, who had not opened his mouth, at his side. Considerable time had been consumed in this last call and it was rapidly growing dark.

"Do you mind going back to the office for a moment?" asked Hardy, and as Dave nodded assent, he leaned forward and gave the necessary directions to the driver.

"Power, that last sale to Reilly was an insult to human intelligence. You played that man like a child—I was almost ashamed to stand and listen to you."

"I've got his order, haven't I?" asked Dave impassively.

"Yes, but we're going to get a cancellation, I'm afraid," answered Hardy. "A sale of that kind can't stick."

"Oh, yes, it can," said Dave. "In the first place, we've got five hundred of his money, and when he

sees Mrs. Keegan, she'll do the rest. And between Keegan and Reilly and the rest of that bunch, they're going to buy a lot more land when I get the time to go back and make them do it."

"My hat off to you," said Hardy, shaking his head contemplatively. "It was a lucky day for both of us when I stopped on that street corner in New Orleans."

When the two men reached the office, it was deserted, dark and silent. They switched on the lights and went into Hardy's private room. He seated himself and waved Dave to a chair, then unlocked his desk and produced a pad of paper and a checkbook and looked up.

"Let me have those contracts and checks, please," he said. Then making notations on the pad: "Keegan contract—two thousand dollars; Reilly contract, two thousand dollars; total four thousand dollars—and an eight hundred cash deposit on the sales." He opened the checkbook, filled out a blank signed and blotted it, then laid it on the desk between them and leaned back and put the tips of his fingers together as he spoke.

"Your ten per cent of today's business is four hundred dollars, Power. That's what you've made the first day out, and I've had no part in it. You didn't need me at all—you did it all yourself. I've just made out a check for four hundred payable to you; here it is. And I never paid a commission more gladly in my life. I agree to advance your expenses. You don't need advances from anybody. And from tonight on, you work by yourself. Why, man," he leaned forward excitedly, "if you keep up

this pace, you'll be better than I was myself in my best days."

Which was *some* admission from Lynn Hardy, and Dave, shoving the check in his pocket realized it. Hardy was speaking again.

"I said that from tonight on you work by yourself. This is the first time I've ever had a new salesman who struck his stride in less than a month. If I went with you, it would be out of curiosity and I'm afraid I'd only handicap you, so—the 'old man' is out of it as far as you're concerned. Go where you please—do what you please—turn the contracts into the office here. Those are your only instructions." With a sudden change of voice: "If you're going back to the hotel, better take my car and tell the driver I said for him to go get some dinner and be back here for me about ten."

"Aren't you going to eat?" queried Dave.

"Ugh, no," Hardy shuddered nervously. "That onion-loaded Irish stew will last me for a week. Good-night." And he produced from a capacious drawer a great sheaf of letters and started to thumb them over as a sign that the interview was at an end.

Jubilantly Dave drove back to his hotel; went direct to the cashier's window and exchanged Hardy's check for currency, and then went up to their suite in search of Hebe. Finding her out, he composedly shaved and dressed and went downstairs to dinner alone.

With a big, black cigar between his teeth, he walked restlessly up and down the lobby. Alight with elation, he wanted somebody to talk to—some-

thing to do—a sudden thought struck him, and he went to the door, hailed a taxicab and after an interval of some forty minutes returned to the hotel with an awkward, mysterious bundle under his arm and repaired directly to his rooms.

It was ten-thirty when Hebe Norse finally arrived at the entrance to their suite. Somewhere low, sweet music was playing. The hotel orchestra had long since stopped for the night. She idly wondered where and who the musician was, as she turned the knob of the unlocked door and entered.

As the door closed behind her with a little slam, the muffled music ceased and Dave emerged from the bathroom. She looked at him impudently and smiled sweetly.

"Sorry to be so late, old boy, but Crane broke some thingamigjig in his car and we were stalled out in the country a ways."

"Near a roadhouse, of course," commented Dave innocently.

"Of course," she echoed mockingly, and then with a sudden change of tone, "How goes it? What luck today, Dave?"

"Four hundred dollars," Dave replied nonchalantly.

"You sold four hundred dollars' worth?" she asked incredulously.

"No, I *made* four hundred dollars."

"Oh, you big dear." She rushed up to him and he warded off her affectionate onslaught by producing a sheaf of yellow-backs and placing them in her eager hands.

Forgetting her intended embrace, she stopped and

started counting. "Three hundred dollars—all for *me?*" He nodded assent and she added innocently:

"Where's the other hundred?"

Dave looked a trifle sheepish, she thought, but felt she must be mistaken, as if true, it was the first time.

"I bought something for myself," he muttered.

She was not interested in what he had purchased but the greenbacks had aroused an active interest in his business prospects, so she inquired:

"Can you keep this up, Dave?" waving the banknotes.

"Keep it up?" He was scornful. "I haven't even started. Getting the money in legitimate business is a joke if this is a sample. It's a push-over."

Hebe entered the bathroom; Dave made a half move to stop her and then stood stock still and thrust his hands in his pockets. He heard a little cry of surprise and she emerged holding gingerly by its neck a violin.

"Where in the world did this come from?" she asked.

"Why, that's what I bought with my hundred dollars. I've always wanted one, ever since I lost my father's fiddle when I was a kid, but never got around to getting it. So I just happened to have some spare money and the time, and I went out and got one tonight." With a sudden note of pride, "It's a beauty, isn't it?"

Hebe saw nothing beautiful in the old, battered violin. To her it did not represent a value of one hundred cents, let alone a hundred dollars. But

when she spoke she made no comment on that fact; instead confining herself to a question, brought to mind by a sudden memory of the sweet, muffled strains she had heard outside the door before entering.

"Can you play it, Dave?"

"Yes," he answered simply.

"I never knew you could play the violin before," she said in a tone that was frankly curious.

"I played one when I was a boy—but not since my mother died," he responded briefly.

She looked at him in silence before she spoke. Her tones bore a trace of awe.

"That's wonderful. The violin's awful difficult to play, isn't it?" Suddenly offering him the instrument, "Play something for me, Dave, please."

A trifle ashamed of his display of feeling, he took the instrument and without answering, carefully replaced it in the case, shoved it under the bed and calmly started to disrobe. Hebe knew him too well to argue.

As he reached over to switch off the lights, he looked at her. In his face was a stern note which she read correctly.

"I have no objection in the world to your going out with Crane, but—don't forget what I told you last night. I'm not going to speak of it again."

Hebe yawned sleepily, muttered an indistinguishable reply and turned her back as the lights snapped off for the night.

# XI

## DROPPING A COMPANION

FOR six months, David Power had been in the land business. And for six months he had been leading Hardy's entire sales force by a large margin. Usually, the unusual success is a subject of envy but Dave had succeeded in winning the admiration of his associates as a business man to say nothing of their whole-hearted approval as an individual.

He was turning to leave the office one evening, when Hardy stepped into the room.

"Good evening, Power," his tone was smooth and suave, "can you spare a moment for me?"

"Certainly," and in spite of the fact that he was in a hurry to get to dinner, Dave walked into the ornate private office. Hardy closed the door and switched on the brilliant lights before speaking.

"Pretty well satisfied with yourself, aren't you?" and the real estate man smiled complacently.

"No," returned Dave evenly, "I'm not."

"What?" The other was surprised. "Why, man, you've made nine thousand dollars in the last six months. Without a penny's investment you've been drawing down fifteen hundred a month—and not satisfied. Why, pray?"

Dave grinned.

"I made four hundred dollars the first day I

went out. What a man does once he should be able to do again. Twenty-five working days a month—four hundred a day—that's ten thousand dollars—twelve months a year——"

Hardy interrupted him.

"Stop! Man, if you keep on figuring you'll have all the money in the world." He changed his tone abruptly. "Remember that new man you trained last month?"

"Yes."

"He's doing splendidly. And the other two chaps you showed how to sell. Their records are highly satisfactory. Power, how do you do it?"

"Just reverse your method," answered Dave pleasantly.

Seeing Hardy's puzzled look he explained.

"You see, you train a new man to sell by trying to teach him your way. You build a new structure every time you train a man. I just listen to him and when he's right say nothing—when he's wrong, correct him. I 'patch' the old structure—you erect a new one."

"Not bad, not bad. I get the idea." Hardy gazed out of the window for a moment, then turned, "I've got another fellow for you to train if you will. Hired him today. It's rather an imposition on you to ask you to do this, isn't it?"

Dave's answer was surprisingly truthful.

"It is," he replied simply.

Hardy hesitated, loath to believe his own ears.

"But you'll do it, won't you?"

"I will not."

"Why?"

"That's a foolish question but I'm going to answer it. I'm on a commission basis. I get paid for what I sell. Now, every time I take time from my selling to train a man for you, I am cutting down my income without getting any return for it. God only gave me twenty-four hours a day, the same as other mortals. That time is my capital and from now on I'm not going to waste it."

"If you feel that way about it, certainly I'm not going to ask you to break in any men," interjected Hardy hastily.

"Another thing," said Dave tersely, "as long as we're on the subject. Inside of two weeks from the time I started I was outselling the rest of your force. They asked me how I did it. I showed them. One thing led to another and I permitted myself to fall into the foolish habit of giving the bunch tips on how to sell, showing them where they were wrong and setting them right. My dope worked; as a result, I find myself a victim of my own good nature."

"I know that," Hardy nodded.

"I like the boys. Don't want them to think I'm a grouch. But these time-wastes have got to stop. I'm through with everything that isn't going to make me money. That's selfish, but it's business, isn't it?"

Hardy weakly assented.

"All right. Glad we had this little understanding. Good-night." And nodding briefly Dave hurried out of the office.

Upon his arrival at the hotel, he found the graceless Hebe awaiting his return with impatience.

"Hello," he ejaculated in surprise. "You here—why aren't you out doing society with Crane?"

"Can't I stay home once in a while if I like?" she asked. "You certainly do pay me as little attention as possible, Dave. I've been waiting for you an hour and a half—didn't know whether you were coming or not."

"Very, very kind of you to wait, I'm sure," Dave said mockingly. "But had I known I was to have the honour of dining with you, I'd have hurried home, you may be sure. You've almost made a bachelor of me lately, you know." Then—suddenly and sharply, "Is *'my friend'* Crane out of town?"

She answered before thinking.

"Yes——" Then she bit her lips in exasperation and immediately changed the subject. "Did you know that several people in the hotel here have complained about your violin playing?"

Dave smiled as he opened the door for her. "And as a result—for the sake of peace and quiet, you've been thinking we had better move to some place where people don't object to music without meals. Is that the idea?"

"Yes, let's do that." She stopped as Dave looked sharply at her, then quietly resumed: "I'm getting tired of this hotel life anyway, aren't you?"

"Personally, I haven't had very much time to get tired of it, but—you know, you're the one to be pleased."

With that the subject was dropped. The coffee cups had arrived on their dinner table before Hebe reopened it. She simulated a careless air.

"Don't you think, Dave, it's about time we two wanderers had a little home of our own?"

"Yes, dearie," Dave mimicked her tone, "a little place where I could play the violin without annoying people and you could have flowers. I presume you've counted on a beautiful garden—or maybe just window boxes." He laughed as he suddenly changed his tone. "Come on, let's have it: tell me what you're thinking of before I tell you."

Hebe involuntarily smiled, a little sheepishly perhaps. "I guess I should know by this time that it's no use trying to fool you; as you once said, we know each other's thoughts almost—at least you know mine," she hesitated over the last words. "So here goes. Yes, I'd like to go to housekeeping. There's an eight-room place out on Hollywood Avenue that we can get complete with servants and it won't cost us any more than it does up here. The people who own it are going East for the Winter. I went out and looked it over today. It is the——"

Dave finished for her:

"——cutest, most darling little place you ever saw," he grinned. "What did you say it would cost?"

"Well, they're going to rent it furnished and I've got it all figured out——" Hebe glibly began to run off a maze of figures and estimates, concluding with: "So you see, a hundred dollars a month more than we are paying at this old hotel will give us a home of our own, and," triumphantly, "what I said about folks complaining of your violin playing is true. So there!"

"That sounds reasonable enough," remarked

Dave thoughtfully. "A home of our own for what it costs us to live here; only about a hundred dollars a month more and a place where I can play my fiddle undisturbed and without disturbing others. That's what I call real thoughtful of you. When do you want to go out and see it?"

"Tomorrow morning." Hebe saw victory in sight. "Will you take it?"

"Let me see," Dave thought for a moment. "No, I'll go tonight. I had a couple of appointments but I'll let them slide over. Since you have seen fit to honour me with your company this evening, let's celebrate by hiring a house. I really don't know why I should look at it if it satisfies you, but for the sake of doing things right, I'll go and see it. Come on, let's get started."

The house on Hollywood Avenue was handsomely furnished and the bright moonlight showed well-kept grounds around it. Dave shrewdly asked for figures and finally, convinced that Hebe's estimates of cost were not over 50 per cent wrong, closed the deal, gave a check for the first month's rent and left. The entire transaction took about thirty minutes.

On their way back to the hotel, Hebe suddenly sat bolt upright with the air of one to whom a vitally important matter nearly forgotten had just recollected itself.

"Dave, I almost forgot something."

"What is it, Mrs. Housekeeper?" asked Dave lazily.

"Mr. Crane wants us to have dinner and to go to the theatre with him next Saturday when he gets back. Is it all right with you?"

Dave neglected to answer—his eyes rested meditatively on the telegraph poles as they shot past in their machine. Hebe spoke again.

"You needn't refuse. It will pay you to cultivate that man. He thinks you are a brilliant fellow—told somebody only the other day that he had his eyes on you for a comer, a big success."

"Thank him kindly for his compliments," Dave spoke slowly, "and hand them back to him—without mine."

"Oh, Dave, you're so peculiar," Hebe pouted. "Please go just this once—for me; it's your duty; you should be seen in public with me once in a while."

"You're right, Hebe," Dave remarked with sudden decision. "You've been a pretty good scout and I guess I'll have to loosen up myself once in a while whether I like it or not. All right for Saturday."

She squeezed his hand gratefully and he was surprised to find that it gave him a thrill which he had considered long since past.

The moving process was a simple one. The following day the house owners moved out. The day after that their trunks were sent down from the hotel and the Powers were established in their new home. Trying to free himself of the entanglements of which he had spoken to Hardy, Dave kept religiously away from the office, transacting his business via the telephone and through the mail, and finding the method satisfactory in the extreme.

On Saturday morning, the telephone bell rang. Dave, alone at breakfast, naturally supposed it was for the former occupants of the house, as no one

as yet knew that Hebe and he were established there.

He was therefore surprised when the coloured maid told him the call was for "Mistah Powah."

"Hello!" It was Hardy's voice. What in the world did he want? His tone was decidedly irritable.

"Yep, this is Power," answered Dave smoothly.

"What in the devil does this mean, anyway? I've been trying to locate you for twenty-four hours. Those chumps down at the hotel didn't know anything about you. I finally had to go down there myself to find out, and then only got your 'phone number this minute. What's the big idea?"

"The idea is very simple," answered Dave. "We were tired of the hotel and we rented a house on Hollywood Avenue. I neglected to notify you of the change because it did not occur to me that you would want to reach me. Sorry."

"That's all right," Hardy's tone belied his words. "I want to see you——" abruptly—"Come down to the office at once!"

Dave thought for a moment before answering.

"Can't do it, Mr. Hardy. Got a big deal on today and it will take me until late this afternoon."

"I want to see you at once——" Suddenly Hardy's tone changed. "But that's all right. Yes, go ahead; take care of your deal. Tell you what I'll do—what's your number on Hollywood?"

"3456."

"Thirty-four fifty-six——" evidently Hardy was writing it down. "Hollywood Avenue is on my way home. I'll drop in and see you—about five o'clock, say?"

"That'll be fine," said Dave mechanically, and as the receivers clicked back, he stood buried in deep thought. Unmindful of his barely started breakfast, he went upstairs to get his portfolio of papers.

Hebe called sleepily through half-opened doors: "Don't forget—theatre tonight, Dave—get home in time to dress."

"All right," he responded and slowly left the house. What was afoot that should make Hardy come to his home to see him?

Something was wrong that Saturday. Dave wrestled and strove with his "big deal"—a group of five people whom he was trying to induce to purchase a large acreage jointly—but toil and work as he would, he could not get out of his mind the morning 'phone call. This was a decided handicap on results. Finally, feeling that his absence would produce a greater benefit than his presence, he cut off short at three o'clock and walked all the way home, arriving there about four-thirty.

The walk and his ruminations had not improved his temper and it was in a sullen mood that he shoved the latch key into the door of his new domicile.

At the grating of the lock, Hebe started up quickly, and hastily regretted that she had bedecked herself in evening finery at that early hour. It was Dave, she knew, and he was so contemptuous—so intolerant of little womanly weaknesses. She judged correctly from his looks that he was preoccupied—a gentle cough failed to attract his attention as he walked into the room, so she spoke.

"You look tired tonight, dearie—had a hard day?"

His answer was a snarl: "Don't call me 'dearie.' Try to remember, please, that we are no longer in the medicine business." Brought back to earth by the little passage, he stepped to the sideboard and poured a small drink of mellow rye.

As he re-entered the living room, Hebe timidly laid her hand upon his arm. He started and wheeled savagely. Remembering his injunction, she omitted the "dearie" which hovered on the tip of her tongue. "What *is* the matter, Dave? I know there's something troubling you tonight."

It was the human impulse to talk—the desire to air his thoughts aloud, seldom yielded to—rather than any desire to confide, which made him answer. "Hardy is what's the matter. Had a little mixup with him first of the week. He 'phoned me this morning, sore about something, and he's coming here tonight at five. What does he want? That's what's bothering me."

The woman's comment, made after a slight hesitation, was a true reflection of her companion's thoughts. "Aren't things going well with you? I understood that you were doing nicely. Crane says that everybody in the business is talking about the success you've made, and we certainly have had plenty of money. Hardy can't be thinking of letting you go, can he?"

An indistinct mumble was her only reply to the question and realizing his desire to be alone, she silently left the room.

In the back of Dave Power's head lurked a tiny

but potent germ—a disquieting sense of insecurity—a vague fear that it was all too good to be true—that he would awake some morning to find his fifteen hundred a month and the Hardy project a mere dream. And Hardy's unexpected 'phone call of the morning had multiplied this feeling of unrest and insecurity.

Don't smile. Of course, logic and reason made this fear sheer nonsense, but—consider the man's nomad, mongrel past. A few months of ease and luxury cannot make a man forget what's gone before. It only heightens the contrast. And back of it all was the concrete thought that should some evil chance separate him from Hardy and his proposition, he would not know where to turn—circumstances *might* force him back to the old life. And he did not want to go back.

The electric bell rang loudly and Dave answered it himself. He opened the door, admitting Hardy, and his employer's entrance found him complete master of himself, cool, collected and ready to meet any crisis that might present itself.

Beyond a brief greeting, no words were exchanged. Hardy dropped into a heavily cushioned armchair. Dave standing with his back to the window, noted that in spite of the luxurious upholstery, the little man slid uncomfortably about. Hardy was the first to speak.

"I've been doing a good deal of thinking about you since last Monday, Power." He paused.

"Yes?" said Dave inquiringly.

"I'm seriously considering making a certain move and I can't quite make up my mind, so I've come

down here to seek your help in reaching a decision."

Dave maintained a discreet silence.

"There's no use parleying or fencing: you brought something home to me last Monday and I've been asking myself ever since whether it wouldn't be first-rate business on my part to——" He hesitated and Dave hung on his next words—"to—ah—that is—make you manager of the whole outfit. After carefully considering what you've done in the way of selling and training new men and speeding up the old force—well, I'm going to admit that you, with certain provisions, should be able to put the business ahead faster than I, myself, can," the last words a trifle sadly. "And that is *some* admission from a man who attributes his success almost solely to his ability in that very direction.

"Power, I'm physically and mentally tired. My physicians say 'rest.' If you are ready to shoulder the responsibility, I am going to try and put back on a few of the years I've taken off my life. The only reason I have always done this work myself has been because up to the time you came I never found a man I felt could do it as well as I—but now it's different. You've got youth, energy, ability and virility, and I've got a business that needs you at the helm."

Within him, Dave's heart leaped in momentary exultation, then settled back into its normal, steady pulse, but his shadowed face showed no trace of emotion. So it was promotion instead of dismissal! Well, at any rate, his intuition had not played him false—for a change *had* been at hand. Hardy was looking at him inquiringly. He took the cue.

"This is a surprise—a pleasant one." To save himself Dave found no words beyond the trite phrases he uttered. Hardy spoke again.

"You might as well understand that provided we reach an agreement, I'm going to make you General Manager of the 'whole shooting match,' relieve myself of the entire load at one time."

"That doesn't sound possible to me," commented Dave quietly. "So far as the selling end of your business is concerned, I'll take that over, lock, stock and barrel, and make it jump through with flying colours—on that division I know what I'm doing, but have you stopped seriously to consider the fact that when it comes to your finances and your land development work and those other branches that your General Manager should control—well, I'm a baby in arms, for I don't know the first thing about them?"

"Is that an admission of weakness?" queried Hardy shrewdly.

"No, it's an admission of inexperience, and a man who doesn't know how to shoot a gun is a plain damn fool to say he does know, when the food of the party depends on his marksmanship."

"Your simile is all right in one way, but pretty poor in another. The 'food' of this particular party depends upon the 'marksmanship' of the sales department first, last and always; and you certainly know how to load, aim and fire that particular 'gun'." Hardy leaned back and half closed his eyes. "Don't worry, Power; I've considered all those things. My business is so departmentized and superintended that at the head of each division

is a man who thoroughly understands and knows his end of the business. He and he alone is responsible for his department. The General Manager simply sees that these department heads are kept on their tip toes and puts in his real, hard licks in getting the contracts faster than the rest of the organization can handle them—if possible."

Dave thought a moment. Hardy's words had clarified the situation. He spoke with decision:

"The whole thing, then, as far as I am concerned, is down to a matter of terms—salary, if you'd rather put it that way."

"No matter what your ideas are in that direction, we won't be far apart—that is, within the limits of reason, and I know you are reasonable enough." Hardy smiled as he spoke. "But there is another thing to be settled before we can get together. There are a couple of questions that I am going to ask you to answer truthfully. And I warn you, they're vitally important to both of us.

"You're competent, and I'm satisfied on that score; you're willing to work, I know that, but——" Hardy suddenly turned around and looked Dave square in the eye, "just how long are you going to last?"

"That's the first question, isn't it?" Dave wrinkled his forehead a little as he spoke. "Well, frankly, I do not understand you. Make yourself more explicit, please."

Though his face was solemn, inwardly Hardy smiled. Power was pinning him down and he liked it. He arose and slowly paced up and down as he spoke.

"When I hired you down in New Orleans, I didn't care a continental what your personal habits might be just as long as you produced results. You came to me with that distinct understanding. But—as my General Manager—as my direct representative in the eyes of the business world, a large, important part of my commercial reputation comes into your care and keeping; consequently, the situation changes. When you step from salesman to manager you step from personal liberty to responsibility; and I'm very naturally going to be extremely particular what you do outside of working hours, as well as in them. Now, what chances am I taking of your actions jeopardizing either my money or my interests, or my reputation?"

Dave considered a moment before replying. Evidently the other man intended to continue to deal in veiled questions and hidden meanings. Very well, in that case, he would give an answer broad enough to cover anything and everything Hardy might have in mind.

"When I came up here to Los Angeles, my usual liquor consumption was in the neighbourhood of from fifteen to twenty drinks a day—real stiff ones. I've cut it down to one or two now—and those few I take only after business is over. Now, mind you, I did this not because whiskey harms me physically, mentally or financially, for as a matter of fact, it does neither; nor has my opinion or liking for it changed in any degree. But the people I trade with evidently regard the odour of liquor on a man's breath as a mark of unsoundness—it discounts what he says. That's why I've practically stopped drink-

ing, because I'll never knowingly handicap myself or overlook any single card that might help me make money."

He paused a moment before proceeding.

"I like this life—it's the biggest money and the easiest I've ever made—and I really know what easy money is." His eyes burned for a second, but the fires died down. "Back where I came from, the whole route I travelled, a man used his brains to plan with and his fists to carry out his plans. I can fight—started because I had to, kept on because I liked to. But since I've been planted in this world of yours, I've realized that here, *brains* count most, and *brawn* not at all, and bar accidents, I never expect to use my fists again as long as I live.

"If you're afraid of my temper, forget it. When a man does anything I don't like, I can make him do what I want—without trouble." Dave paused for a second to note the effect of his words. Hardy was nodding approvingly, so he continued: "So far as women are concerned, I'm simply not interested. The world very kindly takes it for granted that the woman who lives here is my wife. You happen to know that she isn't. If I had been as wise when I met you as I am today, you'd be calling her Mrs. Power as sincerely as the rest of 'em. But that's a matter of no importance." He leaned forward and emphasized his next words with clenched fists. "The one thing I am interested in now, is *making money*—a lot of money. I know I can do it. I have the essentials that bring back money and I'm going to cash in. Liquor, women, friendship, dissipation—nothing, no temptation that you can

mention, counts one little bit with me when it comes to a question of money—cash money!

"If it's necessary to make good and get what I want, I'll be as big a hypocrite as the world requires. If I thought it would add one dime to my income, I'd join a church and pass the plate on Sunday, and on Monday make the congregation pay me handsomely for acting the part they forced me into. The one big difference between my kind of hypocrisy and the particular brand most people wear is that I don't even make a faint attempt to deceive myself."

Dave smiled engagingly to take the sting from his next words, but Hardy recognized them for the cold, bare truth.

"What I'm after—money—is too easily made by legitimate means to justify any man's taking a chance to get it. Only fools and failures steal. I'm neither, so you needn't fear for your funds. If I could beat you out of a million dollars without being punished, I would. Were conditions reversed, you could truthfully say the same. But I can't, so I'm not going to. Look here, man: the one big reason that I'm going to make money for you is that I'm determined to make money for myself. There's your protection and insurance all in one. Does that answer the question you had in mind but didn't ask?"

To most men such a speech would have been impossible. Its raw, bleeding truths would have torn convention to rags and aroused rebellion instantaneously. But to Hardy it simply represented a presentation of the facts he was already in possession

of—a verification and marshalling of the things he had surmised, guessed and reasoned out. When he next spoke, his voice had a peculiar note.

"Will you pardon me if I seem to take a liberty?" and with the words he carefully and painstakingly closed both of the doors leading into the room. Dave watched him with a half smile on his handsome face.

"That's a rather useless precaution, Mr. Hardy. There's nobody in the house except the servants and Hebe."

"It's important that we have no accidental listeners." Hardy rubbed his hands together nervously and Power automatically noted the curious, harsh sound the friction of the two dry palms produced. "You've told me a lot of things that had a direct bearing on my question. But you missed the most important point of all—possibly because you are unaware of its existence. So for my own satisfaction I'm compelled to ask you a very peculiar question—indelicate in fact, and I hesitate because I fear that the mere asking will either antagonize you or force an untruth." He stopped short with an inquiring glance at Dave.

Dave took the cue. "You cannot antagonize me and I know of nothing I need lie of to you. Ask the question."

It was self-evident that Hardy voiced the truth when he stated that it was a difficult question to ask, for he hemmed and hawed, made several false starts and finally voiced it with the air of a man anxious to pass an unpleasant subject quickly.

"You said a while ago that you didn't intend to

ever have another fist fight, so I guess I'll risk it——" The question itself came sharply and distinctly, "*Are you in love with this woman—Hebe?*"

"*No, I am not!*" Without hesitation Dave answered and his four curt words carried conviction with them.

Hardy moistened his dry lips as he spoke again. "Just how do you feel toward her?"

"What in the world are you driving at, anyway? Come out and talk sense instead of just words." Dave's tone was intolerant; he was tired of this beating around the bush.

"What would you do—how would you act—if—well, if for instance you discovered that she had an affair with another man?' Again Hardy wet his lips nervously.

Now Dave understood the careful closing of the doors. He paused a moment and carefully considered before answering.

"What would I do? I'll tell you *exactly*. If she wasn't *too* open about it; if she did nothing which might injure me in business, then I'd pay no attention. But if it began to look like noise or scandal or trouble ahead, I'd take her on a little pleasure trip and she'd never come back." He grinned at Hardy's sudden start and added: "Of course, I wouldn't harm her physically, but the right moral persuasion properly applied would keep that lady away from my vicinity for good and all."

At last his mind was at ease. Hardy was fully satisfied on every point and ready, yes, anxious to leave. He picked up his hat as he spoke.

"That's all settled—a closed chapter. And—oh,

yes, about salary—compensation, I nearly forgot the most important thing of all. You've been making fifteen hundred a month. I'll start you at four hundred a week, with arrangements to increase your salary as fast as you produce results. How does that appeal to you?"

Dave nodded abstractedly. In silence he listened to his employer's polite little speech of farewell and injunction to be at the office Monday morning to settle details. Automatically he accepted the other's outstretched hand, his eyes all the while fixed on the man's face.

"I appreciate your kindness," Dave said almost mechanically, "and I'll be there Monday as you suggest. I've answered a lot of questions for you; will you now please answer one for me? What do you think—how much do you actually and positively know—who is she mixed up with?"

"That's not fair." Hardy's hand was still in Dave's grip and he did not seem to be able to release it. "I didn't come here to tell tales—I'm not a scandal monger or back-door gossip. All I wanted was definite assurance that my general manager wouldn't land himself in jail for wife-beating or on the front pages of the newspapers for worse."

"Neither of the things you mention is going to happen and you know it!" Power's voice and manner were both cool and calm. "I merely want to protect myself against open scandal, that's all. It's to your interest to forewarn me. I've been too busy to watch." At this point the suspicion of a sneer crept into his voice,—"and haven't cared much anyway. I sha'n't molest either of them but I want

to know." Then came the sharp, quick question, accompanied by a grip of iron that made Hardy wince: "Is it Crane?"

"Yes!"

"Pardon me; I'm afraid I unintentionally hurt your hand," and he looked apologetically at Hardy's injured member. The latter opened the door and passed into the hall.

"Thanks, Mr. Hardy, and good-night!" David Power was as unconcerned and cordial as if the other had brought neither the news of his promotion nor the tidings of Hebe's infidelity. It did not occur to him to doubt the other's word for an instant. Hardy's motive was a genuinely selfish one, and had he not been positive of his ground the matter would never have seen light through his agency. This Dave knew to be a fact.

He slowly walked up the stairs to the landing. As he turned toward the bedroom, Hebe emerged.

"What did he want?" she queried anxiously.

In a preoccupied manner Dave replied: "He wanted to make me general manager of his business and I accepted the position."

"Oh, Dave, what luck! And you thought he was going to discharge you!" With the words Hebe threw her arms around his neck and kissed him full on the mouth. "How much is he going to pay you?"

"About what I've been getting with as much more as I earn. That part's all OK," answered Dave, neglecting to mention the part that was all wrong.

"Well, hurry up and dress for dinner. Mr. Crane

will be here any minute. I'm all ready but you've got to bathe and shave and dress—we're going to be late. I'll wait for you downstairs." And Hebe gently shoved him in the direction of his bedroom.

Obediently Dave performed his ablutions and slipped into his evening clothes—his mind miles away from the tasks his hands unconsciously performed. So it was Crane! His question had been almost foolish—it could hardly have been anyone else. Well, he had to give Hebe credit for one thing—she had certainly selected money.

Not that he really cared, but it seemed too bad when things were going so well that she should entangle herself in an affair of this kind—a sudden rush of blood to his head made the great veins swell and throb; for a second, a terrible rage gripped him by the throat and made him sway on his feet. To think that he—David Power—should be made a fool—a tool—and by a silly woman and a dissolute roue. But as quickly as it came, the rage passed. What did it matter, after all? The woman meant nothing to him—neither did the man. It might be that Crane had been sent by a kind Providence to clear away an encumbrance from his feet. No legal ceremony united them; when the time arrived she could be dropped. Probably it was all for the best. His face cleared. He even hummed a little tune as he tied his cravat and carefully adjusted a truant stud. His thoughts raced to the future and Hebe Norse held no part in them.

A ring at the door announced the second visitor of the evening—Crane—and brought Dave back to earth. His final glance in the mirror revealed the

fact that his shirt was soiled—the bosom of it. He laughed, removed his coat and found a fresh one in the dresser drawer.

Outside a chauffeur waited patiently for his passengers. On the great davenport fronting the fireplace Hebe and Crane sat, their hands tightly clasped. The first intimation the pair had of Dave's presence was his footfall as he stepped from the heavily padded hall carpetings on to the hardwood floor that edged the room.

Instantly Crane sprang to his feet as Dave switched on the lights. The oil man was a bit uneasy and a trifle embarrassed. The rôle of husband deceiver was a trifle too fine for his calibre. But the warm handshake and cordial greeting of his host completely disarmed him and set all his doubts at rest.

The city of Los Angeles was literally packed, jammed and crammed with pleasure-seeking, money-spending Winter crowds, and the brightly lighted theatre which was their after-supper destination was filled to the doors with an audience which in brilliance and costuming rivalled that of a Continental watering-place.

Even in this assemblage of wealth and beauty, the trio stood out in distinct relief.

"Beauty and the Beast—and the Prince," whispered the black-gowned usher girl who seated them as she and a companion hurried back up the aisle. A woman who had noted the trio overheard the low-toned comment and smiled at its terse and accurate description.

Had Dave heard the remark and understood its

meaning he would have laughed at the "Prince" as applied to himself, but would, no doubt, have been forced to admit that the "Beauty and the Beast" fitted Hebe and Crane to an exact and mathematical T!

# XII

## A NEW PROPOSITION

WHEN the curtain dropped at the close of the first act, Dave arose and stepped out into the lobby to smoke. The urge of a Scotch highball propelled Crane in the same direction, Hebe having no objection to being left alone. The oil man's thirst satisfied for the moment at least, he joined Dave and the two stood smoking in the ornate corridor awaiting the warning bell which foretold the rising of the second curtain.

With bright eyes Dave watched the throng—to him there was always fascination intense and absorbing about a crowd of humans. Men and women individually were comparatively drab and colourless—but collectively they presented so many facets that they constituted an absorbing study of which he never grew weary.

New faces came and went. To himself Dave gravely considered the serious problem of why, since God gave all humans the same facial equipment of eyes, ears, nose and mouth, they could look so very different from each other. He glanced at Crane, who was leaning on his gold-headed stick and obviously posing. He smiled and looked away—toward the entrance. His eyes stopped suddenly and fixed themselves upon the back of a woman's head.

There was something unusual, distinctive, about the back of that head. It was not the way the hair was done, the coiffure was simple; it could not be the ears, for they were hardly visible. It evidently was not the white neck or the poise of the head. What was it? At that instant a grey-haired man arrived and the woman turned toward the entrance, revealing first her profile and then her full face. And in that instant all David Power's ideals of womanly beauty underwent a sudden and complete change and he beheld before his very eyes what seemed to him the perfect woman!

The lobby, crowded as it was, became de-peopled; he could see one face. His stare was almost rude as the girl slowly advanced with her escort. He felt an unrest within him, an almost insane desire to draw close and gaze his fill. It wasn't physical desire; it was something cleaner, purer, stronger, deeper. Surging like a stream of sparkling spring water, it came racing uncontaminated through the murky flood that had been his mind, making all else seem drab and soiled and worthless. Had he known it, there came into his life at that moment the first swell of worthy emotion he had ever known. He did not analyse—he couldn't, but the impulse he felt was that of protection; he wanted to step between that girl and the world and fight her battles for her.

They were drawing closer. Dave started. Was her escort speaking to him? No, it was to Crane. The couple stopped. Dave's intent gaze was still on the girl; she modestly dropped her eyes. What was Crane saying? He was introducing them! Mechanically David Power went through the for-

mality of meeting "Mr. Rogers" and "Miss Rogers." The father was speaking.

"No, we're going to slight the Coast this Winter, Mr. Crane. Going down to our Palm Beach home. Rosalie likes it for a change every once in a while.

"Rosalie!"

Dave rolled the name in his mind. It fitted her. Rosalie—Rosalie Rogers. That name would mean something to him for the rest of his life, even if he never laid eyes on her again. As the couple moved away, self-conscious for once, he guiltily refrained from looking after her. Crane was speaking.

"Say, boy, you certainly made a dent on the fair Rosalie—she turned around and looked at you twice, then smiled at me to cover it up. If you weren't married, I'd sic you onto that. Papa's worth enough to buy the State of California. Mother dead. Only child. Some catch!"

Dave could have struck him. Her name on the lips of this man offended him beyond words. He viewed his emotion with amazement. The news of Hebe's dalliance with the man by his side had left him almost unmoved, but the mere name of the girl he had looked upon once, passed lightly forth, aroused within him an almost uncontrollable desire to smash, break and bruise the mouth that desecrated something clean by merely mentioning it. He clenched his hands. The call-bell relieved the situation and the two re-entered and seated themselves.

Surreptitiously Dave searched the house for Rosalie Rogers. He found her in a balcony loge so far

removed that her features were almost indistinguishable. And in the darkness he dropped his lids and visualized her features in his mind's eye.

After the performance he failed to locate the girl. Evidently she and her father had left early for they were nowhere to be seen.

Crane led his guests to the best patronized restaurant in town, and proving the old rule that where brains and brilliancy fail, cold cash wins instant recognition, instantly secured the most desirable table in the place, in spite of the crowds awaiting seats.

Wine before food was the invariable order of Crane's parties. Where the other two indulged freely, Dave drank sparingly. Openly and brazenly, Hebe, made more bold than usual by the wine, leaned toward Crane and whispered in his ear. Dave paid no attention; he had pleasanter things to think of. His words were few and preoccupied; as a substitute for conversation he offered a mechanical smile.

Flushed by the wine, excited by the crowd, Hebe leaned closer and closer to Crane. A woman at a nearby table commented on the situation to her escort. Dave by chance heard and thoughtfully considered his two companions. For the first time since he had known the man, his heart warmed toward Crane. Unknowingly, unwittingly this man was destined to perform a great service for him. He leaned forward and beckoned the attentive waiter to refill the half-emptied glasses.

When the elaborate dinner arrived, the inner man —and woman—being far more important to Crane

and Hebe than a mere affair of the heart, they proceeded thoroughly to satisfy their generous appetites. To himself Dave smiled; underneath everything these two were as close akin as two peas from the same pod. Peculiar thoughts indeed for David Power!

He was not in the humour to eat and scarcely touched his food. Hebe commented as her own appetite began to wane.

"I guess Dave's too excited to eat much tonight."

"That so—why?" inquired Crane politely.

"Mr. Hardy appointed him general manager today. Aren't you going to congratulate him?"

The effect of the news on the oil man was distinctly surprising. He stopped eating and looked up, showing every sign of keen and genuine interest.

"Is that a fact, Power?" he asked incredulously.

"Certainly; I go on the job Monday morning." Dave watched him with concealed amusement—what was the matter with the man?

The oil operator picked up his fork and made a show of resuming eating, but it was obvious that his mind was working faster than his jaws. He had even omitted the formality of congratulating Dave on his unexpected promotion.

One of the biggest oil operators in America outside of the trust, Gerald Crane had many and diversified interests. In fact, he had more things to do than he could personally care for with any great degree of efficiency. His one great obstacle to more rapid progress had been the difficulty of finding men capable of completely managing his various properties. From a business standpoint, his estimate of

David Power was extremely flattering; and he had gone to the trouble of verifying his judgment with a definite end in view. The man had no compunction whatever about mixing his clandestine love affair with business. In fact, he gave the matter no thought. Hardy's sudden and unexpected promotion had almost put Power out of his reach. It anticipated a move he had been contemplating.

He pushed back his plate and looked at Dave. The man had forgotten the woman—the wine had dropped from him like a cast-off cloak; his manner smacked of the business office as he spoke:

"Power, I'm no hand to beat around the bush. Old man Hardy has beat me to something I've had in mind for a long time. I'm going to lay my cards on the table and let you see what's in my hand."

He bit his lips and knitted his brow, indicating earnestness.

"Hardy's in a little, piking business—that is, compared with mine—and as long as you're with him, your future is cramped by his limited possibilities. With me, the sky is the only limit. There are more millionaires to the square inch in my game than there are to the square mile in his." He leaned forward. "Now you've got the little girl here as well as yourself to consider and you don't want to waste time with Hardy. You'll find out that I am right. I'll give you a position that'll start you on the high road to a lot of money—quick money—and that's what you want, isn't it?"

Dave nodded quietly, his eyes intent on the speaker.

"You've heard of Hoorah Oil, one of my newer

projects. It's going to be a great, big thing, but I haven't had much time to give to it personally and it's still in the stock-selling stage. The bunch that are trying to operate it are not competent. I said I was going to lay my cards on the table. Here they are: I'll make you vice-president and general manager of the Hoorah and raise Hardy's salary ante twenty per cent without even knowing what he's offering. You can go in, get a sales force together and market the balance of the stock—about a million and a half—and when that's sold and the money is in the treasury, climb in the saddle and operate the company. That's my proposition. Coming quick and clean, I call it. What do you say?"

"I'll think it over," Dave equivocated, more because his mind was not on the other's words than because there was any doubt in his mind about his decision. Hardy was his choice—first, last and always; he knew he could make money with Hardy and he intended to stay, for a while at least.

Crane was a good business man. He saw that the time was not ripe to press matters, so he deftly postponed the issue.

"That's the correct idea—sleep over it. We'll have lunch together next week and discuss the details. Then you can make your decision when you've got all the facts in front of you. Suppose I 'phone you Monday morning as to when and where we meet. How will that be?"

Dave nodded acquiescence, and shortly after this the party broke up.

The clock on their dresser registered three A.M. when Dave and Hebe arrived home. Hebe opened

a drawer and produced a package of gum and a loose handful of Turkish cigarettes.

Somehow or other everything the woman did or said grated roughly upon her companion tonight; her every action jarred nerves he never had known before that he possessed. It was the fault of contrast. The deep hissing inhalations from the cigarette made him long to leave the room.

Cynically he watched her as she disrobed before him—brazen and boldly unashamed. Mentally he pictured her removing her garb before Gerald Crane —yes, even before a roomful of strange men—with no more concern than she displayed at the moment. And he found nothing improbable in the picture; he saw the woman as she was, with the suggestion of modesty entirely lacking.

"I'm not going to bed just yet," he said, as he switched out the lights.

"Don't play that darn violin and keep me awake all night," muttered Hebe sleepily.

# XIII

## DAVID POWER SHOWS HIS ABILITY

IT was Monday morning and the hands of the big office clock pointed to nine sharp as Dave and Hardy entered the latter's private room. It was characteristic of the two that without weather comment or polite preliminary of any kind, they plunged directly into the business at hand.

"Well, what comes first?" asked Dave seating himself.

"Let me see—" Hardy too seated himself, "you've got to have an office—"

Dave's interruption cut his words short.

"Leave me where I am—in the salesmen's room —or if you want to do something really special, shove a desk against the wall in the outside office, near your door."

"I guess you're human, after all, Power." Hardy glanced shrewdly at him, "You jumped at a conclusion pretty sudden—tried to settle something before you really did any thinking about it. Why did you suggest a desk near my door?"

"It's wasting breath to answer that question," Dave answered shortly. "Because I'm going to run in here every five minutes or so to ask you questions —for a while at least."

"No, you're not going to 'run in here,'" Hardy smiled as he spoke. "Because you're going to be

here. I've decided to share this office with my new general manager."

"What?" Dave was surprised—and with cause. Every man has a hobby he loves to ride and Hardy's particular pet was the exclusiveness and privacy of this magnificent room of his.

"Yes, your new desk will be here some time today. I certainly don't want you subjected to the continual noise and clatter of the general office; it's out of the question for you to remain in the salesmen's room, and this is the only private office in the place, so for the reason you mentioned a while ago: the fact that we've got to work pretty closely together for a little while, you find yourself half owner of the handsomest private office in Los Angeles, if I do say it myself."

"All right! If you're satisfied, I am. What's next?"

Hardy drummed his desk nervously as he replied:

"I tried all day yesterday to arrive at some definite conclusions regarding the best method of breaking you in and finally decided to give you a dose of your own medicine."

"What do you mean?" Dave was frankly puzzled.

"Just this: You told me that your method of breaking in a new salesman was to turn him loose and watch him. So long as he went right you let him alone; you only interfere when something went wrong."

"Yes?"

"Well, that's what I'm going to do with you. I'll try to give you the general idea this morning, then

it's up to you. When you make a mistake I'll correct it; as long as you're on the right track you may keep right on travelling."

"That suits me down to the ground," said Dave. "Aren't you afraid I'll get stage fright with you watching every move I make?"

"I'm not a little bit afraid; are you?"

"No, I'm not," Dave admitted frankly.

"Now, I'm going to tackle a big job—I'm going to try to give you in five minutes and a few words full instructions on how to run this business."

"Shoot!" Dave settled back comfortably and extracted a cigar from his pocket.

"In this business we have three fundamental tasks: we must have something to sell, it must be marketed, and finally, we must collect the money from our customers. Understand?"

"Certainly!" Dave laid down his cigar and counted on his fingers. "Something to sell—that's your operating department, with Henning at head, planting the orchards and cultivating 'em as fast as the contracts come in?"

"Right enough, go ahead," Hardy nodded.

"Then 'marketing it'—that's me at the head of the salesmen. And getting the money is Kirk's job—collections; and he runs your records and bookkeeping department on the side; title, auditor; real job, seeing that the money comes in. How far off am I?"

"Not at all off. On the contrary, you've grasped the idea very quickly, indeed. Now, Power, I personally know absolutely nothing of the detail of operating or bookkeeping or collecting, so the men

at the head of these departments are capable, high-priced men. They do the work and all I do is to watch their reports. As long as results are satisfactory, I don't question the ways and means. You'll have to adopt the same plan."

"The fact that you were lame on the very points I miss out on," Dave interrupted, "is what makes it possible for me, inexperienced as I am on these things, to step into your shoes. Is that the idea?"

"Exactly," Hardy proceeded. "As you know, I have always handled the sales department myself, because up to the time I found you, no man showed up who looked as if he could do the job as well. Now, your real work—detail work, if you want to call it that—is handling the sales end of the business, but in addition you've got a bigger task: to keep everything working together harmoniously; that's where the general management comes in, because as far as the finances are concerned, I'll always handle those myself."

"That suits me all right," answered Dave briefly. He was turning over and correlating in his mind the instructions he had received.

The telephone buzzed. Hardy answered.

"Hello . . . yes, he's here. . . . Call for you, Power," pushing the instrument across the desk top.

Dave placed the receiver to his ear.

"Yes . . . Power talking. . . . Oh, hello, Crane. . . . I'm all right, thank you. . . . Very sorry but I shan't be able to lunch with you today—too busy. . . . Yes, I understand very clearly that you want to talk business, but it can't be done. . . . Nothing is the matter except that I have made up my mind to

stay with Hardy. No use wasting any more breath or time on it. . . . Good-day." And Dave coolly hung up the receiver and turned to his employer.

Removing his glasses and laying them carefully on the desk, Hardy looked silently at the young man, the question in his eyes was as plain as if it had been put in so many words.

Dave read it correctly—turned the matter over in his mind and decided that there was no good reason why he should not answer the unasked question.

"The call was from Crane. He offered me a position Saturday night when he heard that you had promoted me. You just heard me turn him down."

"Crane—Gerald Crane, I suppose?" Dave nodded and Hardy proceeded slowly. "I'm a little curious to know just how he came to make you a proposition and what he offered you—that is, if you don't mind telling me."

"Why should I mind? I'm under no vows of confidence or anything of that kind. Hebe and I went to the theatre with him Saturday night. Afterwards at dinner she mentioned that you had put me in as general manager—"

Hardy interrupted him, almost rudely.

"Are you sure you didn't mention it yourself, possibly with the idea of forcing an offer from him?"

"Not a chance." Dave did not resent the other man's question, for had positions been reversed his mind would have travelled the same channels.

"What object would I have had? I'm satisfied to go along with you. I don't want any of his game;

in fact, I don't want any more to do with him than I can help and still keep peace in the family."

Dave's last words were a trifle vicious in tone and Hardy interpreted them as referring to Hebe's fondness for the oil operator; to avoid unpleasantness he hastily changed the trend of the conversation.

"What did he offer you?"

"He asked me if I wouldn't like to be vice-president of his Hoorah Oil Company—you know what it is. Suggested that I could get a sales force together and clean up the balance of their unsold treasury stock—pull his chestnuts out of the fire. Forget him—I wouldn't do business with him if he were the last man on earth!"

"So," and with the single word Hardy rose to his feet, "so Gerald Crane thought he'd snatch my new manager right out from under my nose and get away with it, did he? Well, he'd better be pretty careful what he does."

Dave looked at Hardy in amazement; the man had cast aside his assumed calm and his voice broke. He paced nervously back and forth before the window, his hands behind his back clenching and unclenching nervously.

"If it's the last thing I do on earth—so help me—I'll put that big, get-rich-quick schemer where he can't meddle with my affairs again."

Dave pricked up his ears, he sensed something behind that voiced threat. Anger makes secrets the property of him who cares to listen. Information is always of value. So he waited for more and as it did not come, he reached for it, speaking with studied contempt.

"That's foolishness, man. Talk sense. You can't sue Crane and get damages or put him in jail for trying to hire me away from you." Then as an added touch: "Besides, the man is too big, too powerful for you to reach."

Dave's calculated words had started Hardy flaming once more. His sense of caution was entirely gone.

"You think so, do you? Well, you're wrong. Some day you'll learn that no man stands so high he can't be pulled down. Crane has been careless. I've got the proof of his carelessness. It's been in my vault for years. In real cash money it might not be worth fifty cents, but used as a lever it's long enough and strong enough to throw this careless friend of ours behind the bars and rip his bank account wide open besides. Now, what do you think of that? Too big and too powerful, stuff and nonsense!"

"Jail, money, Crane!" The connected thoughts flashed like lightning across the mental screen of his listener. Hardy never talked idly. Dave knew there was something behind his words worth knowing. What was it? How could he find out? For a second he sought a diplomatic way of ascertaining but lightning-like changed his mind and decided that the direct method was the one to use. So with studied carelessness he asked the flat question:

"Well, what have you got?"

"Just this," Hardy snapped back. Shrewdly watching his face, Dave decided that the man was thinking aloud. "Years ago I bought a disputed title to some land in Southern California; it came in with a bunch of other stuff and I took it because

it cost me practically nothing. It was one of the old Spanish titles, the Velasques claim, they called it. The land wasn't worth the paper the deed was written on. But today it's different. On that very land the Hoorah Oil is drilling, its wells are located there, including the gusher that Crane based his big stock issue on. And what's more, of late years these old Spanish titles have been repeatedly sustained in court, when they've been backed by enough cash money.

"Crane knows of this title of mine. In the presence of witnesses he admitted its possible validity. When he was asked to protect his stockholders by clearing the land and buying it, he said: 'To hell with my stockholders,' and refused. With him it was and is a promoting proposition. He was more interested in water in stock than oil under the properties."

Here was information with a vengeance. Some day it might be of value. Who could tell? Hardy was talking rapidly and almost without pause and Dave almost held his breath to avoid interrupting the train of thought.

"Now, the one smoothest trick that Crane ever played in his life was when he went down to New York and took in a gang of Wall Street sharks to help him in the earlier financing of Hoorah—'took 'em in,' I said, and that is exactly what I mean! When he got through, the cash was in his hands, he still owned the company and all they had was worthless or near worthless stock certificates. Just how he did it, I don't know, but those are the facts. He was clever all right. The Wall Street crowd could

afford to lose the money, although it was a big pile, but they couldn't let a man beat them and get away with it. They rule by fear and it would set a bad example. So ever since, they've been after him and they won't let up until they get back what they lost, with interest, big interest. And with this old land title of mine in their possession they'd have a ton of lead to hang around Crane's neck when they pushed him off. So," with a sarcastic inflection, "you think the man's too big and powerful to be pulled down, do you?"

Hardy evidently had finished talking but there were questions in Dave's mind that he wanted answered while the opportunity was ripe.

"Don't the Wall Street crowd know about this title of yours?"

"Know about it, certainly they do. They've been negotiating with me for months."

"Why don't you sell it?"

"Simply because I hate the crowd and everything they represent. I have never liked Crane but there's a difference between dislike and hate! And that difference has kept me from selling out. Half an hour ago I would have given Crane the preference over them at an equal sum. But now he can't touch that title for love or money. One of these bright days I'll teach him a lesson he'll never forget and get ten thousand dollars for that worthless scrap of paper besides!"

The fires were dying down in Hardy. Dave perceived this. Storing the facts away in his memory, he dropped the subject and got down to business.

The balance of the morning was spent in going

over reports and by one o'clock when the two men went out to lunch together, Dave had a fairly clear idea of the operation of the business and his duties. His clear, simple, direct method of thinking enabled him easily to separate fundamentals from the non-essential mass of detail and this together with his experience in the field enabled him to absorb in hours what would have ordinarily taken weeks.

About three in the afternoon Hardy pushed back his chair. His still slightly trembling hands showed the effect of his morning's outburst.

"Well, Power, I guess you've got all I have to give you for the present. The rest of it will have to come from actual experience. Can you think of anything else right now?"

"No I don't believe I can." Dave spoke slowly and thoughtfully. "You've given me the gun, showed me how to load and aim it and the rest has got to came from practice."

"Right. Now, both Henning, our operating manager, and Kirk, our auditor, know of your appointment. I 'phoned them Saturday so it wouldn't come like a blast from the sky so I guess the next thing is to call them in, notify them formally and have a sort of general talk."

"That's a good idea."

"Now, one thing more. You understand that I had to have some sort of a logical excuse for putting a new man over the heads of executives who had been with me for years, and if I had said that it was because I believed you more capable than they, it would have resulted in ill-feeling and handicapped you at the start."

"What reason did you give?"

"I told them that you had made a considerable cash loan to me personally. And as I am depositing seventy-five thousand dollars today to the firm's credit, they will assume that that is the loan."

Dave made no comment. Occasional moves like this were the things that made him respect Hardy. But his inordinate curiosity to know the full workings of every idea made him ask one question.

"Why did you say I loaned the money to you? Why didn't you tell them that I had bought an interest in the company?"

"Because if I sold you an interest they would demand the privilege of buying one themselves, and I want no partners in my holdings. Then again, Kirk as auditor, would have detected the deception unless I went to a lot of trouble loaning you money and having stock issued and endorsed back to me, so I took the simple way and said it was a personal transaction. Shall I call them in now?"

"Please. But, before you call them in, have you any objection to leaving us alone for a while so I can really get next to these fellows? Your presence is going to put a constraint on us if you stay here."

"You're the general manager. If I leave in about five minutes, how will that be?"

"Fine. Thank you."

Kirk and Henning came into the room and silently seated themselves. Their attitude was noncommittal. The appointment had come to them like a bolt out of the blue and, capable men both, they sat back and awaited developments.

Hardy arose.

"I don't need to introduce you to Dave Power. You both know him, know his record in selling our land, know him personally. From this minute on he is going to run our sales, and in order to free my time he is also going to act as general manager. I might add that I have him to thank for a cash accommodation that puts me under decided obligations, but that is a matter apart from what we are discussing. The last thought I want to leave with you is that from now on, deal with Power. Don't come to me. He is the man you must look to."

Hardy pulled out his watch as he continued.

"I've got an appointment and shan't be back today. I'll just leave you fellows to talk it over among yourselves. Good-bye."

And with the words he passed out of the room, leaving the three men facing each other across the table.

Dave's first words might make or break his future. He realized it fully and when he spoke there was in his voice a kindlier, more friendly note than usual.

"Mr. Hardy has put me in a pretty difficult position and I want to try to climb out of it before we start anything. I'd like to have you fellows understand my feelings.

"In the first place, Henning, I don't know a thing about planting and cultivating and operating. You do, you know all about it. So my fingers are forever off your department.

"Now, Kirk, if you put me up against a set of books or a collection record, I couldn't tell what we had coming from what we owed, so I guess you know

I'm not going to fool with the things that you've built a reputation for handling efficiently.

"I *am* going to handle the sales department. I *do* know that, just as you fellows know your ends, but when Hardy said I was general manager, he made a misstatement. I am not."

Dave paused, and shrewdly regarding his audience, saw that he had their interest His admission of ignorance and concession of their ability had turned stiffness into a receptive attitude.

"Now, here we are—three men, each in charge of a department. Each knows how to get the best results out of his department, but to make the business prosperous all divisions must work perfectly together. The general manager must accomplish that result. Now, the question is: who is going to be the head? As I said before, I'm not."

Again he paused. His audience was all attention.

"I'll tell you. Our general manager is going to be *the opinion of all three of us. Do you get me?*

"We—you two and myself—are going to run this business together and decide on what's to be done and settle who's going to do it. And that goes. It will be a matter of vote."

Conservative Kirk nodded approvingly. Impetuous Henning burst out in speech.

"That's just what this business needs, Mr. Power, and if Mr. Hardy had done it years ago we'd have made twice the money we have."

The barriers were down. Dave had won his subordinates and the discussion which occupied the balance of the afternoon was as warm and friendly

as if the new relations had been established for years.

When Dave left the office that night it was so warm and pleasant that he decided to walk home. As he strode along his heart was light within him and his thoughts raced ahead of his feet. And strange to say, his mind dwelt, not on the winning over of his subordinates nor yet on the auspicious start of his régime as head of the Hardy Syndicate, somehow or other a certain sweet-faced girl he had met once occupied the centre of his mental stage. The picture of Rosalie Rogers in his mind's eye was as clear and clean-cut as the girl herself.

# XIV

## HOW TO HANDLE A PROBLEM

A NATURAL born executive, the operation of the Hardy business came easily to Dave. Within a month he and the other two executives were working in close harmony and he turned his attention directly to the sales department. Hardy beamed and smiled. He had made no mistake in his choice. Six months showed new records set, made and broken by the rapidly increasing staff. To himself Hardy even admitted that the pupil had already excelled the master.

And as for his home life, Dave found living in a house extremely agreeable. Hebe and he saw about as little of each other as two human beings could and still be living together. Her affair with Crane had progressed to the point where it was open and bold. Dave's sudden rise in the business world had made him somewhat of a figure in the town and gossip owing to his indifference to hints and implications, naturally multiplied and grew.

But while people talked and Hebe and Crane continually fed the wagging tongues, and while Hardy uneasily listened to the news and worried lest it should get to the ears of his unusually efficient employé, Dave went tranquilly on his way, working eleven and twelve hours a day and playing his violin for recreation.

It was eight months from the date of Dave's appointment when business necessitated Hardy making a trip to Chicago. Urgent as the necessity was, the little man hesitated to go, feared to let Dave pass from under his immediate eye lest some unfortunate crisis followed by a drastic act of vengeance might deprive him of his new manager. This fear had grown to the point of an obsession with him. The whole affair was in the hands of the Fates, so far as Dave was concerned. He did not care and that settled it. But Hardy's imagination pictured the other man brooding in silence over Hebe's infidelity and seeking to drown his thoughts in an ocean of work.

Finally, simply forced to go, Hardy sought some faint ray of assurance against trouble during his absence.

"Power," he said, "I've got to go to Chicago this afternoon."

"Yes?" said Dave questioningly.

"I'll be gone about a week and I am going to ask you to do something, or rather not to do anything, while I am gone. Will you?"

"What are you talking about?" asked Dave rather curtly, for he was occupied with some statistics and figures still troubled him. "What do you want me not to do?"

"I want you to give me your word of honour," the little man was as earnest as grim death, "your solemn promise not to do anything rash while I'm gone. Much as I despise and dislike the man, I don't want you to do anything which might react and injure you personally. Will you promise?"

"Certainly," answered Dave readily, not fully understanding but preoccupied with the statement which lay before him. And much to his surprise, Hardy insisted on shaking hands upon the agreement before he left the room.

Impressed by the great stress his employer laid upon the affair, Dave dropped his paper, wrinkled his brows for an instant in deep thought, then, understanding, threw back his head and laughed.

"He certainly doesn't understand me. It's ridiculous. He still has the terrible fear that some day in a rage I might cut off Hebe's head, or Crane's, and he would thereby lose a first-class, hand-made general manager. It is to laugh!"

Two days after Hardy's departure the office boy brought in a card and laid it on Dave's desk.

As a matter of expedience, it had become an office rule that whenever a man asked for Mr. Hardy he was sent in to Dave's office. In this way the burden of callers was easily and quickly shifted from the real estate man's shoulders to those of his manager.

"Asking for Mr. Hardy," he said.

Dave looked at the card:

MILTON SHAPIRO,
BARRISTER,
NEW YORK CITY.

"Where have I heard that name before?" He searched the recesses of his memory and suddenly it came to him. "Of course, he's attorney for the steel people. I've seen his name mentioned in the papers. Wonder what he wants with the old man?"

Milton Shapiro entered the office and without asking permission seated himself at the side of Dave's desk. Dave noted the man's slow, deliberate movements, his lack of haste and the unconscious grace of his every movement.

Neither spoke for a moment. They were sizing each other up. Here at Dave's desk sat the greatest lawyer in America, from a standpoint of income. His hair was grey, so were his eyes, his beard was long and inclined to be a Van Dyke. Small in stature, he wore his clothes carelessly, yet they showed the earmarks of costliness. From all outward appearance he seemed like thousands of other men, yet Dave's seventh sense gave him the feeling of strength and mind about the man.

"You are Mr. Hardy?" Shapiro broke the silence and while his voice was low and agreeable, Dave caught the distinct note of query it carried. He avoided the direct lie by an evasive answer.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Shapiro?" at the same time nodding and smiling non-committally.

"I expected to find a much older man." Shapiro paused again.

"Age, they tell me, is more noticeable on the inside of the head than the outside. And your business with me is?" No man wasted less time in the small courtesies than David Power. His curt remark brought matters to a head, as he had intended.

"I see. You are one of the men who insist on getting down to brass tacks in sixty seconds. Very well, sir, your wish is my law. I represent the group who have been corresponding with you for some time

past, Mr. McHaig, of Consolidated, has been our spokesman, regarding the Velasques title."

Fate had cast something into Dave's hands. What it was he did not know, but he proposed to find out. So he settled back in his big leather chair, smiled encouragingly and said, "Yes, go on."

"I happened to be coming West," the lawyer removed his glasses and carefully cleansed their surface with a fine linen handkerchief, "a little pleasure trip, and McHaig asked me to drop in and talk the matter over with you personally, so here I am."

"Pleasure trip," the careless construction was being put on Shapiro's call intentionally to depreciate the value of the Velasques title. Dave felt it, knew it. The lawyer was talking again:

"About what figures are you holding that title at, Mr. Hardy?"

The old trading instinct made Dave's easy answer a question.

"What are you bidding?"

"Really, we haven't devoted much thought to the matter. As I told you, I just happened to be West on pleasure and dropped in personally to find out what your views of the matter were."

The beating around the bush incensed Dave. He would see if this was a careless, incidental trip, he would find out just how much importance they placed on the matter. And his next words startled Shapiro out of his studied calm and brought him bolt upright in his chair.

"There's no use wasting your time or mine, Mr. Shapiro. To tell you the truth, I sold that title yesterday."

"To whom?" The lawyer's question came like a shot. And Dave noted that the knuckles of his clenched hand were white with tension.

"To Gerald Crane, the oil man." Dave's eyes searched the other's face for every telling sign.

"My God!" the lawyer dropped weakly back in his chair. "You did that, without consulting us?" Then with sudden hope: "Has the transfer been made yet?"

Dave nodded.

The mask dropped from Milton Shapiro's face. His brow wrinkled. He frowned and arose.

"Well, Mr. Hardy, I'm going, but I want to tell you that you've made a big mistake financially and otherwise. We shan't forget this, and if you had the sense that God gave an ass, you'd have known that we would have outbid Gerald Crane, no matter what he offered."

Both men were on their feet now. Dave simulated great surprise.

"I don't understand. I thought you were West on a pleasure trip and that this matter was of little importance. I certainly didn't know you were as interested as all that."

Shapiro looked at him, in his glance was contempt. His one-word answer was a whole dictionary of scorn.

"Rot!" he said as he turned on his heel to leave.

"Wait a moment," called Dave, and Shapiro paused.

"What is it?" The attorney's tone was almost rude.

"Come back here and sit down. We've got a

basis to trade on now that we didn't have when you came in. I still have the Velasques title!"

"You what?" Shapiro could hardly believe his ears.

"I haven't sold it, but I'm going to, to you, provided your price is high enough. Come on back here and let's talk sensibly instead of fencing. I'm a poor swordsman myself."

"Well, I'll be damned." Shapiro pulled out a cigarette and lit it. Dave noted the yellow patch of nicotine stain on his grey beard. He blew out a thin cloud of smoke.

"Mr. Hardy, you told me you'd sold that title just to find out how much value we placed on it, to see how important it was to us?"

"Certainly!"

"If you'll accept a compliment from me, you're a clever man if I ever saw one, and I think I'm a pretty good judge."

"Thank you," Dave grinned, "you embarrass me with your flattery, but not enough to shrink a single dollar off the price of that title."

"What is the price?"

"What are you offering?"

"I'd rather have you name a figure, Mr. Hardy."

"Now, look here," Dave began making strange figures on a scratch-pad. "When it comes to dickering, I'm a poor trader. If we talk back and forth from now to doomsday, I won't name a price. The only way we can get together is for you to state what you are willing to pay. If I consider it fair, I'll accept it, if not, I'll tell you so."

"I see your point, I see it—well, let me think."

Shapiro arose and looked out the window with the air of a man deep in thought. Finally he reached a sudden decision and turned.

"You understand that this title is only one of a number of things we are collecting—it is a link in the chain. But I admit it is an important one and consequently, since you put it on the basis of a flat offer, I'm going to make our best offer first."

"That's right," Dave nodded.

The lawyer leaned forward and spoke impressively.

"Seven thousand dollars—cash—this minute!"

Dave looked at him contemplatively and said nothing. Then he reached for a button and pressed it. The office boy entered in response to his call. Shapiro, thinking that his offer had been accepted and that Dave was sending for the document, produced another cigarette and complacently lit it.

Dave turned to the waiting office boy.

"Will you please show Mr. Shapiro the way out?"

Shapiro dropped his cigarette in amazement.

"What—show me out—what's the matter?"

Dave still addressed the office boy.

"Mr. Shapiro talks in four figures and I am thinking in six. Consequently, we can't understand each other's language."

Shapiro understood and rose—he had plenty of time and didn't propose to be bluffed. Dave was speaking again:

"And furthermore, instruct the girl at the switchboard that I do not want to talk to Mr. Shapiro

under any circumstances whatever, either in person or over the 'phone. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mr. Power!" The boy's inadvertent remark had given his deception away, but a quick glance told Dave that Shapiro had not caught the slip. The lawyer reseated himself and spoke:

"Send the boy away, Mr. Hardy. I'm thinking in your language now."

Dave nodded and the boy left. Now, that he had matters in his hand, he did not propose to press his advantage. On the contrary, his manner became more affable than it had been at any previous point in the interview.

"Yes?" he asked inquiringly.

"You've got me on the hip—I admit it," Shapiro's ease of manner had returned. "You're after the last ounce of blood and I can see that you're going to get it. All right. You said six figures—that means a hundred thousand dollars—I'm not going to offer you that—I am going to offer you absolutely the outside price and you can take it or leave it. One hundred and fifty thousand dollars for that piece of paper! What do you say?"

Dave's judgment told him that the lawyer spoke the truth—this was his outside price. But he wanted delay; he must have time to think, to see how this situation could be turned to his individual advantage.

"Come back tomorrow at two o'clock," he said finally.

"My dear sir—" the lawyer expostulated.

"Listen," said Dave, anticipating a question he knew must be in the other man's mind. "In the first place, I'm not going to play you against Gerald

Crane; I'm not even going to talk to him. But I am going to turn this matter over in my own mind—very carefully. And I don't propose to act until I have time to think. However, I will say that right now two hundred thousand dollars is the figure I'm thinking of."

The lawyer made no comment—his face did not change, although he hesitated a moment before he spoke.

"Very well—tomorrow at two—here at your office. And in the meantime I am very glad to have met you, Mr. Hardy."

"It's certainly mutual," grinned Dave as he shook hands and they both meant what they said. "I like that fellow," he thought to himself as the lawyer left.

The switchboard girl was busily buzzing Power's telephone bell and getting no response. She was looking at the door of his room and wondering why when Shapiro emerged.

As the lawyer passed through the gate to the entrance, she called to him:

"Excuse me—is Mr. Power's telephone bell buzzing? I've been ringing him for five minutes."

"Mr.—who?" Shapiro was puzzled.

"Why—Mr. Power—you just came out of his office." The girl looked wonderingly at this exceptionally stupid individual.

Shapiro stepped up to her instrument.

"You mean the tall, dark, good-looking, smooth-shaven young chap?" he questioned.

"Yes, certainly—Mr. Power—our general manager—is he in his office or isn't the bell ringing?"

The girl was impatient, she regretted asking the question of this stranger. It would have been better to have sent the office boy in to find out.

"Yes—he is in his office—but the bell isn't ringing," answered Shapiro slowly, revolving things in his mind and making no move to leave. Then suddenly:

"By the way, Miss, how about Mr. Hardy? Where is he?"

"In Chicago—back in a few days," returned the girl, caught unawares, looking around for the missing boy.

Milton Shapiro stepped out in the hall and stood for a few moments putting the segments together in his mind. Then he chuckled to himself.

"David Power, Hardy's manager, instead of the old boy himself. Well, he's certainly a smooth article. Guess I'd better look him up a little before I come back tomorrow."

With which wise reflection he signalled the elevator and took his departure.

# XV

## SHREWD DEALERS

AS usual Hebe was out when Dave arrived at the house and he spent the entire evening alone, considering the matter from every angle. He knew that Hardy's outside valuation of the worth of the deed was in the neighbourhood of ten thousand dollars. He wanted the money Shapiro and his crowd offered—Shapiro wanted the Velasques title—and Hardy owned it. Finally, despairing of a solution, Dave repaired to bed, but his restless mind kept him from going to sleep, so he finally arose and, attired in pajamas with a big cigar in one corner of his mouth, took his violin and played himself back into a composed frame of mind. When he crawled under the sheets once more he slept like a baby.

Promptly at two the next afternoon, Milton Shapiro presented himself at the Hardy offices. Since the interview of the day before he had been investigating David Power and the findings of his research inspired him with a deep respect for the man.

After greetings were exchanged, the two seated themselves and as on the previous day, Shapiro was the first to speak.

"Well, are you ready to do business, Mr. Hardy?" and to himself he smiled at the perfect

composure with which his host received the false name.

"No, I'm not," Dave's voice was smooth and even. "This is not a matter to be settled in twenty-four hours and I am going to ask for a little more time. To tell the truth, I've been so busy since you left yesterday that I haven't been able to give the matter the consideration it really deserves."

"That is really too bad. Personally I have never had any difficulty in making up my mind in a very short time when it was a question of selling an article of doubtful value at an extremely high price." Shapiro was waxing sarcastic.

"But then everybody is differently constituted, you know," chaffed Dave, "I, myself, am a very slow and deliberate individual."

"Now, look here, Mr. Hardy," the lawyer's tone changed suddenly to one of stern earnestness, "you've got my offer—five minutes from now," he took out his watch and laid it on the desk, "it expires and your Velasques deed isn't worth a dime, so far as we are concerned. Young man—that goes!"

Dave looked keenly at the other. His perception told him that the man was not bluffing. Equivocating was at an end. Suddenly he saw the move to make and smiled ingratiatingly as he spoke.

"I'm going to get in under your five-minute limit all right, Mr. Shapiro; you've got me scared," he grinned, belying his words, "and there's only one reason in the world why I can't sell you that title—much as I would like to."

"What's the reason?" demanded Shapiro, his face still grim.

"Because it isn't mine to sell. I happen *not* to be Lynn Hardy." Dave paused and watched the effect of his words. To his surprise, the other man's face relaxed, he picked up his watch and smiled back as he spoke.

"Mr. Power, you please me exceedingly—by your frank admission of something I already know, you put me back in a good temper and in a position where we can trade."

Dave's eyes were wide open, unashamed he asked the question in his mind.

"How long have you known that I was not Hardy?"

"Oh, for some time," laughed Shapiro.

"Well, you're a pretty good actor," mused Dave.

"I don't know whether I'd insult you by calling you an actor, but I will say that you've got a good poker face yourself," rejoined the lawyer.

"Now, that that's all settled and I am myself once more," said Dave, "I might just as well tell you that Hardy is out of town; won't be back for another day at least and nothing can be done until he gets here."

"Under those circumstances, I am content to wait," and Shapiro leaned forward, both arms on the desk. "In the meantime, I have heard some very flattering reports of you and your ability, Mr. Power."

"Thank you."

"And I have been wondering what you felt you were in business for?"

"Is that a question—if it is—the answer is easy: Money—cash."

"Good," Shapiro looked keenly into the younger

man's eyes. "Whose interests do you put ahead of everyone else?"

"Diplomacy tells me to say, 'my employer's'—truth forces me to state that my own interests are my first concern at all times."

"Good again—one more question—and I'm not asking them idly. What value do you suppose Mr. Hardy sets on this Velasques title?"

"That I happen to know—in the neighbourhood of ten thousand dollars."

"Fine!" The lawyer arose and seated himself on the edge of the desk where he could look down into Dave's eyes. "Now, my bright young man, I am Opportunity for you, with a big O—I represent the one thing you are in business for—money—and by your own statement you put David Power's interest ahead of everybody's else, so—there is no moral reason why you should fail to act."

Dave saw the objective clearly but not wanting to commit himself, he equivocated.

"I don't understand."

"Oh, yes, you do. I know that you have your employer's confidence. By shrewd trading you, yesterday, induced me to offer one hundred and fifty thousand dollars for that Velasques paper. Hardy's price today is ten thousand. The moment he learns of my offer, his price goes up—up to my figure. And even if he sells, you don't make a penny. But if you can get that title from him at ten thousand, I'll buy it for seventy-five, you'll make plenty, we'll save seventy-five thousand, and Hardy will have big pay for a nearly worthless piece of paper. Can you get it from him, do you think?"

Dave hesitated, his mind working like lightning. Hastily he reviewed every angle of the situation: could it be that Hardy, the old fox, had sent this man Shapiro to test his loyalty. Certainly he did not fear the consequences, but if this were a trap he did not want to fall into it, if only for the sake of preserving his self-respect. When he spoke his words were the unexpected plus.

"What tailor makes your clothes, Mr. Shapiro?"

The lawyer looked at him in amazement.

"Why—a—what's that got to do with it? Hall—of New York."

"Hall—since your clothes are tailor-made, your name is sewed in them. Would you mind letting me see the label in your vest?"

And in perfect solemnity, Dave proceeded to inspect the tailor's label in the waistcoat. Shapiro instead of resenting his action watched him in unconcealed amazement.

"Satisfied?" he asked.

"Perfectly," answered Dave briefly.

"What is the idea? Did you want to make sure that I am really Milton Shapiro and not some spy of your employer sent to test your loyalty?"

"You have a good mind," answered Dave; "that is it—exactly."

"Why, if I may ask," inquired the lawyer politely, "did you look at the label in my vest instead of my coat?"

"Because," answered Dave, "a clever man impersonating another might have had an identification label sewed in his coat pocket but not one fellow out of a thousand would have taken the trouble of

having one put in the inside pocket of his vest; as a matter of fact, the majority of men don't even know there is one there."

"Why didn't you ask me to show you papers that would have identified me?"

"That's the first thing you'd think of, to provide yourself with forged papers, letters addressed to yourself and all that sort of thing."

"Are you satisfied of my identity?"

"If I wasn't I'd be examining the laundry marks in your underclothing," laughed Dave pleasantly.

Shapiro looked shrewdly at the other man.

"You talk like a detective—maybe you've been one."

"Maybe I have," answered Dave lightly.

The office boy entered with a telegram. Dave excused himself and tore it open, then looked up at his visitor.

"You're playing in luck; this wire says that Hardy will be back tomorrow."

"Good enough; now, what shall I do?"

"Go back to your hotel and wait till you hear from me. By the way, where are you stopping?"

"At the Alexandria. Then the deal is on?"

"Yes, it's on. I'll get the title and deal with you direct. But you understand that it will take a little time—to save money, you've got to spend some time."

"Yes, I understand that," Shapiro added on impulse as a natural result of his liking for the other man, "if you've some time to spare, I'd like to have you spend the evening with me. Care to?"

"Thanks, no. We'd better not be seen together.

You'll hear from me the moment there's anything to hear."

"All right. Good-bye."

That evening Dave found a photograph of Rosalie Rogers in one of Hebe's fashion magazines which to him was the kindest gift that Fate could have bestowed. He carefully pinned the picture against the wall in his room and spent the evening playing to it with his violin. When he retired, he laughed at himself for his foolishness, but it was a happy, boyish laugh, the kind he had never laughed before, and it sent a pleasant glow through him from tip to toe.

# XVI

## OFF FOR NEW FIELDS

AT three o'clock the following afternoon, Lynn Hardy arrived in town and went directly to the office. Dave, who as yet had found no subterfuge by which he could reasonably hope to gain possession of the title, greeted his employer wearily.

"What's the matter?" inquired Hardy anxiously. "How are things going?"

"Nothing's the matter and everything is all right," answered Dave, his mind still working on the problem of how to secure the paper.

Hardy looked at him contemplatively. During his sojourn in Chicago he had thought a great deal about the triangle at home which held so many grave possibilities of injury to himself through the loss of Power. Finally, unable to contain himself, he spoke.

"Things all right at home, Power?"

"I guess so," Dave answered abstractedly; an inspiration struck him, he turned, his voice cold as ice. "You told me that your Spanish title—whatever you called it—could be used to wreck Gerald Crane. You were angry when you made that statement. Do you still say so?"

"I most certainly do!" Hardy felt that the question was inspired as the result of searching for

ways and means of ruining the plunderer of his home and was decidedly pleased to find that Power's thoughts were turning to legal rather than lethal methods.

"Let me ask you a question. What is the largest sum of money you could expect to realize from that title?"

"Don't let that bother you. Money is no object; I'll take care of Crane."

At least the way was beginning to open before Dave. His voice was earnest and a little tremble of excitement seemed to pervade it.

"That won't do. I'm going to take care of him *myself*, one way or another. That's *my* job."

The implied threat made Hardy seek to placate the other. He hastened to answer the question.

"Ten thousand dollars is more than it's worth. One of these days soon we'll get together and talk it over. But not now. You're excited Power. I never saw you this way before. Calm down, compose yourself."

True, Dave showed every sign of emotion, but strange to say, what showed on the surface was not a reflection of the things within. He was cool as ice and his clear brain told him that since the way had opened it was unwise to press matters further at this time. Hardy was speaking.

"You've done enough work for today. My car ought to be here now. Let me ride you home. We can talk business on the way out."

Abstractedly Dave went downstairs with his employer. He wanted to be alone to think, to gauge and plan his next move—much depended on it. The

right touch would bring what was to him a fortune. The wrong move, a fumble, and all was lost.

He listened to Hardy's talk unheeding, almost unhearing, as the big car smoothly reeled off the miles. They had turned the corner by his house. He heard Hardy give a quick suppressed gasp and looked up, wide awake again.

In front of his home stood a limousine. The man stepping into it was the cause of Hardy's exclamation. It was Crane; he had been paying a surreptitious afternoon visit. Dave sat motionless; Hardy turned and seized him nervously by the arm.

"My God, man, be cool! Don't get excited."

Dave started to laugh and suddenly changed his mind. His employer's fear was his cue; he would act on it. As Hardy looked he set his lips like grim death, tore open the door and heedless of the land man's restraining arms, leaped from the still moving car, ran to the house and raced up the steps as Crane's limousine moved swiftly off down the street.

For a second Hardy looked after him. "The fat's in the fire now, all right; there's murder in his soul; I could tell it." Which, incidentally was a high tribute to Dave's ability as an actor. For a second Hardy hesitated, then spurred by his fear of losing what he regarded as a new lease of business life, he too ran up the steps and through the open door.

In the hall stood Hebe and Dave. By both shoulders he held the girl and Hardy noted how deep his fingers sank in the flesh through the soft, silk gown she wore. Though her face showed no fear, the pain must have been terrible, and Hardy feeling that it was merely a forerunner of what was

to come, pitied her from the bottom of his soul. Feeling that he must do something—anything—he spoke—but his words were pitifully weak in the face of the tense situation.

"Don't do that, Dave. We'll fix things all right."

No one paid any attention to his futile remark. Dave was speaking now and there was something sinister about his slow, deliberate words.

"Crane just left?" it was both a question and a statement of fact.

"Yes, he did!" The girl even attempted to smile although the pain in her shoulders turned it into a grimace.

"What was he doing here?"

"He left his cane last night and dropped in today on his way home to get it." Hebe's active mind handled the situation in the best possible manner under the circumstances, but she was puzzled—didn't understand. Dave had come home and found them together before without making a fuss. What was the matter with him? Was he acting for Hardy's benefit?

"You lie!" and with the two words he pushed the girl from him, then turned and went up the stairs with a slow, ominous tread.

By his side walked Hardy, white-faced, pleading, frightened, but still clinging to the other man whose steps led to his bed chamber. Opening a drawer in the dresser, he took from it a blue-barrelled service revolver and carefully spun the cylinder to make sure that no loads were missing before slipping it into a side pocket.

The man was insane—Hardy knew it—insane

with a terrible calm more dreadful than wild emotion and noisy curses. Something must be done—at once—Hardy's mind vividly pictured Power on trial for murder and himself back under the load once more. Desperation lent him strength. He threw himself upon Dave and like a man in a dream, the outraged husband permitted himself to be forced into a chair by a man he could have overpowered with one hand.

Quickly Hardy locked the bedroom door, then returning to the chair, he put all of his eloquence into a plea with Power to be reasonable, not to jeopardize his own safety—the woman wasn't worth it; he recalled the promises Dave had made, he exhausted himself. After an hour of pleading he began to see effects. The light of insanity had died from Dave's eyes and in its place burned a cold fire of determination. Brushing aside his employer's restraining hand, he rose to his feet.

"Regardless of what you say or do, I'm going to get this man Crane, and get him right. I made up my mind to that long ago; this afternoon was the last straw.

"I'm through being a passive fool, trying to bury my troubles under a shroud of hard work and closing my eyes to the things everybody sees and calls me fool for being blind to. The woman doesn't count—she's just weak, but the man, I'll get him before either of us are one day older."

Hardy was listening intently, his lips working and his hands nervously clenching and unclenching.

"If I had money," Dave's voice was bitter, "or if I had influence, I'd get him through the law, put

him behind the bars or ruin him. But I have neither —so—I'll use what I have got—these." And he stretched out his two great fists, "or this," and he shoved one hand into the heavily-laden pocket where the blue gun reposed.

"Dave, I've got it!" Hardy grasped at the straw Power had so cleverly offered him. "Don't ruin yourself and your future. You say you haven't money or influence, but I'll tell you what you have got: that old land title of mine. It's yours and it will do the work and do it well. Let me help, will you?"

Despondently Dave shook his head.

"It's no use. I've got to do this job myself. I haven't the money to buy your title. You'll have to let me do it my way," and he turned to the door.

Hardy seized him frantically.

"You don't need money. I'll take your note—or your word. You come with me and we'll go right over and get the papers and have them transferred. I've friends in the recorder's office and we can have it fixed up tonight. I'm going to help you get the sort of revenge on that fellow that will leave you laughing outside while he's behind stone walls serving a term."

And so—Dave listlessly consented. To keep his mind occupied, Hardy rushed him back down to the vaults while he secured the papers; then again over to the recorder's office where the transfer was duly made in record quick time in spite of its being after hours. And finally, in spite of Dave's desire to get away, he took him to his own home and posted his personal attendant outside the guest's door to make

sure that he would not arise during the night and seek the despoiler of his home.

With the title safely in his possession, Dave slept soundly. His only regret was that he did not have his violin so that he might express his emotions through its magic strings.

In the morning Hardy stuck to him like a leech, but finally Dave managed to break away and telephone Shapiro. The lawyer was in his room and his voice was cordial as he urged Dave to hurry over.

"Well, old man," as Dave entered the door, "have you got it?"

In answer Dave threw the envelope containing the title and abstracts on the table. The lawyer picked it up and looked it through carefully, then seated himself and started to write a check. Dave stopped him.

"Are you making out a check for me?" at the same time picking up the envelope and replacing it in his pocket.

"Certainly," Shapiro looked up in surprise at both the words and action.

"Well, how do you know what amount to make it out for?" Dave's tone was casual.

"Why, seventy-five thousand dollars was what we agreed on, wasn't it?"

"No. That was what *you* agreed on—not 'we' —and if you care to consult me, make the check for an even hundred thousand, please."

Shapiro hesitated a moment, then laughed and wrote out the check. As he handed it to Dave he remarked:

"Instead of arguing, I'm going to make you a present of that extra twenty-five thousand, Power, because it's worth it to us and I like you personally."

"May your liking for me always take that form," commented Dave, folding the check carefully.

"Sit down a moment, won't you?" invited the lawyer. "Now, that our little business deal is all taken care of, waste a few moments talking to me.

"Have you ever been in the East—in New York?" inquired Shapiro abruptly.

"No, never east of Chicago—since I've been old enough to know what I was doing, at least," answered Dave pleasantly. What was the man driving at?

"Hm—great opportunities there, my boy. Big business looking for men from the West to make it still bigger. There's money everywhere East if you've the instinct, and I think you have. I could show you deals that make Hardy's entire business look like a peanut stand, and men who make these deals like you buy a handful of cigars."

"Very interesting, but what's the idea?" asked Dave. He had the money in his pocket and he wanted to go.

"What we need is men—big men—they're hard to find though. Every time we locate one he multiplies his earnings many times over, and incidentally adds to ours of course."

"Well, I may come East sometime, and if I do, I'll gladly look you up, if that's what you're suggesting."

"It is, exactly," answered Shapiro. "Do you intend to stay on here with Hardy?"

"No, not now," answered Dave. "I've got a new job."

"What is it?"

"One hundred thousand dollars!"

It took Shapiro a second or so to get the point and smile, but he persisted in his questioning.

"Where are you going—what are you going to do? I don't want to seem impertinent, but I just let you get away with twenty-five thousand dollars without any argument and you might as well spend a little of the breath I saved you in satisfying my curiosity."

Dave's own ideas had been a trifle hazy on the subject. The lawyer's direct questioning crystallized his thoughts. Rosalie Rogers—her father was taking her to Palm Beach. That was seven months ago. It was February now. His mind was made up when he spoke.

"I'm going to lay off—take a rest—going down to Palm Beach tonight, if nothing interferes."

"Going alone?" asked Shapiro.

"Yes," answered Dave as he left.

For a moment after his guest's departure, Milton Shapiro stood in deep thought. "There's a big man in the making. I'd like to keep track of him. He's the first fellow I've met in years that made a strong personal appeal to me and my hunches usually work out."

At last David Power had cash capital. He hurried to the bank, had the lawyer's check certified and deposited it to his credit, after which he drew out his entire balance in cash, stowed the big bills care-

fully away and proceeded in a cab to the land man's home.

"Where in the world have you been?" asked Hardy. "I've been worried about you."

Dave looked at him steadily.

"I've been out making some money for you, Mr. Hardy," and with the words he extracted the roll of bills from his pocket and counted off fifty thousand dollars.

"What's all this?" Hardy sensed something in the air and made no move to touch the inviting pile of greenbacks that were laid on the table.

"We're partners, you know," Dave smiled as he replaced the balance of the cash in his pocket, "and this is your half of our profits—fifty thousand dollars."

"Profits on what?" Hardy snapped.

Dave looked at him steadily.

"On that Velasques title. I just sold it for a hundred thousand."

"But that belonged to me!"

"You forget—you sold it to me." Dave hurried into the thing that was really hard to say. "And by the way, I'm leaving you."

Title, money, everything else was forgotten. Hardy jumped to his feet. "Leaving me? You don't mean—"

"Yes, that is exactly what I mean. I'm leaving your employ and leaving this town, right away—today, if I can make it."

Goaded to desperation, Hardy sneered: "My trusted employé having cheated and stolen from me, is now about to take flight. I understand now."

Dave held himself in check. His voice was smooth and calm as he replied:

"You don't mean that so I'm not going to take offence. But for the sake of a clear understanding, let's review the case a moment. You owned that old title on which you set a value of ten thousand dollars. You sold it to me for that price. I resold it—to the very people in whose hands you wanted it, by the way—and instead of ten, I bring you fifty thousand dollars. I have kept the same amount for myself. We are partners and I hoped that my action, not the money, would prove to you that I wanted to act in good faith. You've done a good deal for me, Mr. Hardy, and I honestly appreciate it."

Hardy looked up, his keen mind saw the matter clearly and he realized that not one man in ten thousand would have pursued the same course under similar circumstances as the man before him.

"You say you're going away. Mind, I'm not accepting the situation, but what are your plans?"

"That question I can't answer, much as I would like to. My plans are really too vague to talk about. I have a purpose, a definite one and one that has nothing to do with business, but it seems so impossible that I had rather not discuss it. But I am leaving here *alone*—cutting loose from these people—making a fresh start. And the only thing I really care to take with me is—your good opinion. I mean that."

"I believe you do," said Hardy slowly. He picked up the pile of bills and placed them in Dave's hand, looking him straight in the eye.

"What's the idea?" asked Dave in surprise.

"David Power, I'll give you that fifty thousand dollars—and ten thousand on top of it, if you'll stay here with me five years more. That's the value I set on your services."

Hastily Dave replaced the bills.

"That money is yours. If I felt that I could stay, I would without a premium."

"Well, Power, if that money won't persuade you to stay, I'm not going to try," and Hardy sighed wearily. "After all is said and done, my sincere good wishes will follow you wherever you go," and he held out his hand.

Dave grasped it warmly. "That's what I came for. Thank you, Mr. Hardy."

As he opened the door, the real estate man spoke again:

"If you ever want to come back here, David Power, don't write, don't wire, just walk in the office, hang up your hat and begin where you left off."

Dave's next move was to hail an express man and absolutely ignoring the dignity of a man worth in the neighbourhood of sixty thousand dollars, he calmly rode on the seat and chaffed the driver as they turned in the direction of his home.

In the meantime Hebe had gathered herself together, bathed her bruises, communicated with Crane and carefully considered the whole matter. After due consideration she decided to feel flattered—it was the first time Dave had ever shown jealousy and she had certainly given him enough cause. Woman-like, she began comparing the two men and smiled

to herself at the sorry figure Crane would cut in a fistic affray with Dave. Then, on sudden impulse she began to try to locate the missing one and the wires to the Hardy office burned.

The express wagon drew to a stop in front of the house. Dave alighted and went inside, followed by the driver.

Hebe opened the door for them before he could use his latch key, but he entered without troubling to speak to her. Instructing the wagon man to bring his wardrobe trunk up from the basement, he walked directly to his room and started throwing the suits from the hangers in the closet on to the bed, whistling blithely as he worked.

Hebe, leaning nonchalantly in the doorway, commented.

"You seem happy."

Dave stopped whistling long enough to answer: "I am."

"Is it—can it be because you are going away?" Hebe's tone was not sarcastic although her words were.

Dave simulated great surprise.

"How in the world did you ever guess that?"

"I won't tell. You see, I've been around a 'detective' so long that I couldn't help absorbing a few tricks of the trade."

Dave grinned at her shrewd shot and having finished cleaning out his closet, proceeded to empty the contents of the dresser drawers upon the floor—systematically—one on top of another.

"Quite a little difference between your present

wardrobe and what you had when we came here, isn't there?" she remarked sweetly. "That old trunk of yours used to be more trunk than clothes and now it seems as if there might be more clothes than trunk."

"What I can't get in I'll leave you as a souvenir," answered Dave.

At this point the express man arrived and Hebe withdrew from the door to permit him to enter. With the trunk in the room, Dave worked like a fury, pitching things in pell mell. Finally Hebe's womanly sense of order overcame her pose and, pushing him to one side, she saw that his suits were properly hung and his shirts and things at least laid in the drawers instead of being stuffed in. In spite of Hebe's forebodings, the capacity of the trunk proved equal to the necessities of the occasion and the express man staggered down the stairs under the load.

Dave reached under the bed and not finding what he wanted, got down on his hands and knees.

"That maid always shoves this case back against the wall as if she thought I never wanted to use it," he exclaimed as he emerged dusty but triumphant with his violin case in his hand.

Hebe had lighted a cigarette and was contemplatively puffing it, still leaning against the door frame.

"Well, dearie, your trunk's packed, you have your beloved fiddle and I can plainly see that your departure is not far distant. But don't you think we'd better have a little talk before you go?"

"Certainly we'll have a talk. Let's go down-

stairs. I want my memo. book and it's in the drawer of the big table."

Dave pocketed his book, laid the violin case on the table, seated himself and lighted a cigar.

"You seem to have started all this, Dave. Guess I'll let you do the finishing." Hebe draped herself on the davenport and looked at the man who was about to leave her.

"All right. I'm going. That's settled. I'm through with you and Crane—"

The woman leaned forward, her assumed indifference gone.

"You don't need to be, Dave," she said earnestly, "let's start all over again. I love you—" she grasped him by the coat—"I have ever since I first saw you that night at Pottzer's, I think. But you've been indifferent—wrapped up in business. I require attention. Forget the past, Dave, won't you?" she hesitated a moment, then her words came breathlessly, "You were going to kill him, weren't you—for me?"

He disengaged his coat from her entangling fingers.

"No, I'm not in the killing business. We're through. That's final! But look here, Hebe, I feel that I am under certain obligations to you. I've made some money and I'm going to leave enough to take care of you for a few years."

Her mask was up again—the genuine emotion she had shown was departed—hidden again behind her screen of assumed indifference, and she smiled.

Her purse was lying on the table and he arose,

reaching in his pocket for five thousand dollars he had separated from the balance of his bills. She arose too and under pretence of finding a fresh cigarette, reached for the pocketbook but it was in his hand first. She picked up the cigarette and lighted it.

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," and as he opened the purse to put the greenbacks in, her eyes did not flicker or change.

A piece of pink paper caught his eye in the opened bag and he pulled it out and looked.

It was a check drawn to the order of "Cash" for the sum of two thousand dollars—and signed by —Gerald Crane!

He looked at it a moment, replaced it, closed the bag and laid it on the table.

At that moment the telephone bell rang sharp and clear. Dave nodded to the woman.

"Answer it—probably for you."

"Hello—yes, he's here," and turning, she offered the instrument to Dave, who silently took it. Probably Hardy, he thought to himself. But it was Shapiro's voice that came over the wire.

"Yes?" he said questioningly.

"Power, I've decided to go to Florida. You said you were going alone. Any objections to my company?"

"Not a bit—glad to have you," answered Dave.

"What train are you taking?"

"Eight-forty-five—the limited."

"See you on the train. Good-bye."

Dave replaced the receiver, picked up his violin case and turned to go.

"Dave," said Hebe, "I've been looking in my pocketbook. You gave me the money, after all."

"Yes. Why not?"

"Well, it's mighty white of you. Aren't you going to shake hands?"

"Sure I am," and he did. She was a good little sport at that. She held his big hands in both her small ones as she spoke, and had she known it, was more beautiful at that moment than ever before in her life.

"Dave, I think we've been a sort of help to each other, at that. Neither of us was much when we started. We're certainly both better off now. You're going to do something in this world—I know it—and my best wishes go with you, even if I can't."

"Thanks, Hebe," said Dave, a trifle sheepishly. "Same to you."

"Till we meet again," her voice was bright once more, but no more cheerful than that of the departing one who replied sincerely.

"I hope that may be—never."

And could he but have known it, his wish was a wise one.

# XVII

## A REAL WOMAN

AFTER making sure that his luggage was safely aboard the train, Milton Shapiro sought the Pullman conductor and ascertained the location of his travelling companion's reservation.

It was a compartment in the observation car. He entered, seated himself and settled down to wait. Power joined him just as the train began moving. Under his arm he carried a violin case.

"Hello, Power," Shapiro showed real pleasure as he greeted Dave. "What have you there, a violin?"

"That's what it is," Dave seated himself and drew a deep breath of ease and contentment. His troubles were left behind; he was on his way to Arcady.

"Do you play?" There was a fine flicker of genuine interest in Shapiro's eyes as he asked the question, but Dave ignored it. "A little—once in a while."

"I'm very fond of music, especially the violin," hazarded the lawyer.

"Is that so?" And Dave abruptly changed the subject. "How long do you expect to be at Palm Beach?"

Shapiro eyed him shrewdly. "I'm inclined to give you a truthful answer to that question."

"As you like," returned Dave indifferently.

"All right, we'll make it an honest one then. Well, I'm going to be at Palm Beach—just as long as you are."

"That so?" Dave's interest was not even awakened. He threw away the cigarette he had been smoking and remembering that he had packed a box of cigars, reached for his grip.

"You see, Power, I am interested in you. Our crowd can always find a place for good men. Frankly, you look to me like a promising business possibility. I had nothing particular to do—might as well be in Florida as on the Coast, so I decided to go along with you and—well, to put it bluntly, size you up, study you, make up my mind where we could use you best."

"Where you could use me best?" quoted Dave thoughtfully. The faint note of patronage in the lawyer's voice had not escaped him. "Listen to me, Mr. Shapiro," his drawl turned cold and hard, "you invited yourself on this trip, so you're not my guest; therefore I may say anything I like to you. You have, what I would call, a lot of nerve—it took sheer gall to force yourself on me for this trip, and I honestly can't find the right word to describe what you've just said. You 'studying me'! Wait till you're asked. I don't want your job; in fact, I don't even want your company; and the sooner you leave this room, the better I'll like it. Understand?"

Shapiro's jaw dropped. The shock to his pride was great, the blow to his judgment was greater. He realized his mistake and it was decidedly the highest tribute that David Power had ever received

when this lawyer, the greatest in America, reached hurriedly for words with which to soothe the waters he had unintentionally troubled. When he finally spoke the man's words simply dripped placation.

"You're right, Power, and I'm wrong. Usually I try to think before I speak; for once I was thoughtless. Although I intended it as a compliment, my intentions are far less important than the construction you put on the matter. Forget business. I'm here simply because I entertain a strong personal liking for you. I neither want to be a source of annoyance, nor do I intend to intrude upon your privacy. Frankly admitting that I enjoy your company, I want as much or as little as you see fit to give me. Now, what do you say?"

Dave eyed him narrowly. Suddenly his lids opened wide and he spoke.

"That's entirely different—when you put it on a basis of personal liking. I've had few friends but I know their value. I was rude. Forgive me; I'll gladly have you as a friend, not because you are Milton Shapiro," he paused and smiled his winning smile, "but because you're you. How's that?"

"It suits me fine," and the lawyer reached out his hand impulsively to bind the bargain.

Along toward noon the next day, when the two repaired to the club car, Dave discovered that the lawyer possessed a fine taste for a certain cocktail. As usual, the liquor had no more effect upon Dave than so much water, but as round after round appeared and disappeared, Shapiro's tongue wagged more and more freely. And always in after life, Dave directly attributed his first lesson in finance to

a certain club car attendant's genius in mixing cocktails.

"Power," said Shapiro dreamily, "tell me what in your opinion is the difference between big and little business."

"How should I know? What *is* the difference?"

"Just one thing," Shapiro gazed far away out of the car window. "It's all in the head. The little man thinks 'one dollar,' the big man thinks 'one hundred thousand dollars'—or a million. That's the whole secret. Think big and you act big—act big and you *are* big."

Dave laughed. "I'd say that a fellow pretty near had to think in dollars before he began to dream about the hundred thousand figures."

"You would? Well, you're wrong. A man may be actually dealing in pennies, but if he's made of the right stuff he thinks up in the big figures until his bank balance catches up with his thoughts."

"That sounds all right—I don't know enough about it to judge. Anyway, it's a pretty general statement," said Dave thoughtfully.

"Well, suppose I make it specific, prove my case." Shapiro emptied his glass and set it down carefully. "So far as I can judge, you're a big man mentally as well as physically, and yet really to capitalize that ability of yours, you've got to let your mind reach out 'way beyond the actual figures you're dealing in for the moment. There's many a bartender who if he permitted his thoughts to stray out beyond the fifteen-cent borders might easily have been a millionaire. By this same rule you'll find many a

man riding around in his limousine who, if he hadn't held the big thoughts, would be saying in as pleasant a tone as possible, 'What'll it be, boys?'

"Take my own case. Fellow named Landon and myself were running a law business in Cleveland—partners in poverty, that's what we really were. Landon lived on what he made and saved a little—God knows how. He thought in pennies and lived on them—or rather, existed. I, well, I owed everybody I knew and a lot of people I was just acquainted with. I was holding the big thought and looking for the big chance."

Dave smiled. "Modest, aren't you?"

The lawyer's answer was unexpected.

"No, are you?"

"That shot hit!" admitted Dave. "Go ahead."

"Well, in the same building there was an Irish lawyer named Channon—more politician than attorney. He took a shine to me—proved it by lending me money once in a while. One day he dropped down to our rooms and made a little speech. 'Boys,' said he, 'I've got the real old granddaddy of all chances to get rich—with room for us all on board. Some fellows I know are consolidating about forty steel mills—the out-of-date ones that are not operating. They intend to turn the pump on the stock issue, water it to the guards, unload on the public, take the cash and the old mills and buck the trust. I'm in as counsel. I need help and you fellows are as welcome as the flowers in May if you care to come.'

"Landon—his mind full of pennies—asked: How much cash fees?'

"Channon told him: 'Not a dime—we're all gamblers together.'

"I accepted; Landon refused. After Channon left the office he turned on me.

"'You're a fool, Shapiro!' he said. 'There's no cash in sight; all that man is offering us is a gilt-edged chance to go to jail. The equipment of those mills is junk. About three-quarters of them are shut down. The rest ought to be, for they're losing money every day or they wouldn't consider this crazy consolidation. That crowd is capitalizing at the rate of a thousand dollars in stock for every fifty cents' worth of questionable assets in sight. They may sell the stock—though I doubt it—but even if they do, what chance have they got of bucking the trust with that tumble-down outfit of theirs? None! Any way you look at it, there's trouble ahead; if you go in I'm through with you.'

"I remember his every word because I moved up to Channon's office that day and we started to work. We took stock for our fees—and since we knew the small value behind it, we got big blocks of the pretty printing for our services. It was almost waste-paper at that stage of the game.

"But, man alive, the stock sold; and then along came a boom wave of prosperity with demand for steel products almost double the available supply. Our old mills came along with a production that under the prevailing high prices sold at a profit. And today the company that Landon refused to come in on is the trust; we put the other fellows out of business.

"And Landon? Well, I understand that by hard

work he has built up a practice in Cleveland that is paying him some years as high as four thousand dollars.

"But look at it from any angle, the fact remains that I made my income grow to fit my thoughts; I didn't hold it down by dollar-limiting my mind. Call Channon luck if you want to, but if I hadn't thought the big thoughts the big chance would never have arrived. Or if it had, I'd have been another Landon."

The lawyer refreshed himself. Dave regarded him keenly. The man's words gave him a vitally interesting insight into the simplicity of big and seemingly complicated successes. The idea of steel kings starting as threadbare promoters obliged to pay their bills with semi-worthless stock appealed to him immensely. So long as his companion continued to impart information of this kind, he was more than willing to listen. So he asked a question that had been in his mind for some time past.

"Mr. Shapiro, I'm going to ask you something because I honestly believe you can answer it. Honestly, now; what do you consider the one big principle governing the making of much money?"

"I'll answer that question and I should charge you plenty for doing it but I'm not going to." The lawyer looked keenly across the table. "First of all, create a proposition that offers big returns and is extremely plausible. Then get a good lawyer to keep you on the safe side. Capitalize your project in a big stock issue. Sell the stock and legally retain the major part of the cash received. Understand?"

"I think I do," answered Dave slowly. "In fact, I believe I understand so well that one of these days I'm going into something along just the lines you suggest—and if I can afford to pay your price, you'll be my lawyer."

"And to show you where I stand," rejoined Shapiro quickly, "I'll be that lawyer. My fee will be a share of what you make, and I'll get a whopping big price. That's what I think of you!" Then unexpectedly: "Have you ever known a confidence man?"

"Yes," answered Dave easily, smiling to himself at the way Shapiro's eyes would have opened had he seen fit to amplify his answer.

"Peculiar thing. There's a mighty narrow dividing line between the confidence man and the promoter. All commerce is based on confidence. Both classes specialize in putting confidence in the hothouse and bringing it to full bloom over night. The difference between them is mainly a matter of degree. The swindler hires a lawyer to *get* him out of jail and the promoter employs one to *keep* him out. One is a swindler because he gets money and gives nothing in return; the other man is a financier because he gives just enough in return for the cash he receives to make his operation legal."

"The con man has 'victims'—the promoter has 'investors,'" interjected Dave.

Shapiro chuckled. "I must tell that to Carruthers. He'll enjoy it. I want you to meet him. There's a man who knows everything worth knowing and acts as if he knew nothing. That takes some wisdom, eh?"

Dave nodded acquiescence.

"Carruthers was the first man I ever heard say that money begets respectability; that no matter how shady or questionable your early dealings may be, a little money immediately makes you respectable, and a lot of money—well, that makes you an aristocrat."

It all dovetailed in with Dave's understanding of things. He was not even mildly surprised to find that the fundamental views of the greatest lawyer in the States on the subject of money and its acquirement coincided exactly with those of Abe Pottzer, operating a dive in the shady section of Chicago. In one way, Dave Power was fortunate: he possessed no ideals, no halos cast around individuals. To build up he did not first have to tear down.

At Jacksonville, the two changed cars for the last lap of their long overland journey. The porter's buzz on his compartment bell awakened Dave in the morning. Unheeding the fine white dust which had sifted in over his clothing during the night, he hurriedly dressed and alighted at the Royal Ponciana with Shapiro by his side.

The lawyer pointed to a sidetrack housing several private coaches.

"There's a familiar face," he commented.

"How so?" asked Dave.

"It's my private car, the *Myra*. Guess Carruthers, the chap I spoke to you about, must be down here; he had it when I went West and wouldn't give it back."

Dave smiled absently; he hadn't heard a word.

Down what seemed miles of green-carpeted corri-

dors the two men walked, finally arriving at a welcome oasis equipped among other things with a mahogany desk and a smiling hotel clerk who immediately and obsequiously greeted the attorney by name. Shapiro registered for both without consulting his companion as to his wishes in the way of accommodations. Dave, however, failed to notice the omission.

"Well, how about a bath, Power?"

"Not right now, thanks."

"Breakfast first?"

"No—a——" Dave suddenly arrived at a decision. "Tell you what, Shapiro: you go take your bath and eat and I'll look you up a little later; I've something to attend to just now."

Shapiro strolled off in the general direction of the dining room. To himself he smiled and hazarded an absolutely correct guess as to the character of the "something" his companion had in mind.

Dave turned to the clerk.

"Do you know where Gail Rogers' home is located?"

"Certainly, sir. Right on Lake Worth, five minutes' walk, or one of the chair boys will take you there."

The "chair boy" idea appealed to Dave.

"Where will I find the 'chairs'?" He was not one whit ashamed of his ignorance.

"Right out of the door, sir, and turn to the left —at the foot of the stairs, sir."

Had Dave only known it, his arrival with Milton Shapiro and inquiry for Gail Rogers' home had won

him more "sirs" than would an expenditure of hundreds of dollars a day.

For a moment the sparkling blue waters of Lake Worth, the balmy air and the majesty of the great palm grove held him. He stood and drew a deep breath down to the very bottom of his lungs. He was on the threshold of a great discovery. For a second he hesitated. Should he telephone first? Sternly he gathered himself together—the very thought was a suggestion of weakness. Descending the stairs, he stepped into a wheeled chair and the negro attendant swiftly pedalled him away to the Rogers house.

The dwelling was a massive structure of grey stone, impressive in its simplicity but severe and forbidding in its architecture.

"Looks like a factory set in a flower garden," thought Dave to himself as he sounded the great iron knocker.

No answer. He banged again, a vigorous stroke or two. Finally the high, carved portal swung open, revealing a man servant.

"Is Miss Rogers at home?" It suddenly occurred to him that there might be more than one girl in the family and he amended his inquiry, "Miss Rosalie Rogers?"

For a second the servant hesitated as he took stock of this extremely early morning caller. Then, satisfied with his inspection, he drew back and said:

"Step in, I'll see, sir."

As no card was forthcoming, the man repeated the name carefully and disappeared up the stairs.

The house was quiet as death. Guiltily Dave

looked at his watch—the hour was exactly eight-thirty-five. Five minutes elapsed. He twisted uneasily in his chair and looked again at his timepiece. He found himself tapping the heavy piled rug with one foot. He arose and walked up and down the long room. Once he even glanced longingly at the door through which he had entered. David Power for the first time in his life was experiencing the agony of nervousness.

A slight sound made him turn and what he saw at one and the same time steadied and calmed and reassured him. Everything must be right, everything was right; he was repaid, for before him stood Rosalie!

And wonder of wonders—miracle of miracles—just as if they were old friends, she smiled sweetly and spoke:

"Good morning, Mr. Power."

He stood there drinking in the sight of her. She was holding out her hand. He took it in his palm. The clasp was warm and firm—feminine and yet carrying that sense of comradeship so unusual in a woman.

"You remember me then?" his eyes searched hers anxiously.

"Yes," she answered simply, "I do." She hesitated for a moment and added, "Have you been in Florida long?"

He loitered over his answer, filling his mind and his soul with the sight of her. How tall she was for a woman, yet she didn't seem tall! How smooth and soft her hair! And that dull blue skirt she wore below the creamy silken blouse—what had its colour

to do with her eyes? Suddenly he came back to himself; he had not answered her question.

"You asked how long I had been here. Well, I should say at least thirty minutes!" and with the words he smiled that wonderful, warm smile of his and she read aright the deep sincerity that burned behind it; her woman's intuition caught the hint of tenderness in his eyes and the man force that had brought him there. And womanlike she retreated where she longed to advance.

"Won't you sit down?" and she tried to inject into her words a formality that belied the warm light of friendliness and understanding that danced in her eyes.

"No, thanks," Dave's slow reply was mechanical; he had never seen such beautiful hands, long, tapered, perfectly formed fingers. He glanced back up at her eyes again. She spoke.

"Since you prefer standing, why not try a little walking—we have a tropical garden on the place which folks say is quite interesting."

Dave suppressed a mad impulse to utter some inanity about "any place where you are is a garden to me," and silently followed her out to the grounds.

The splendour of the tropic garden was as dull grey in Power's eyes beside the radiance of the girl beside him. And as they strolled her heart, too, pulsed faster.

Now that acquaintance had been cemented, Power wanted to get away so that he might be calm and plan, for in her presence he found himself unable to think coherently. She asked carelessly:

"Do you swim?"

"Yes, I do," and with his answer a picture of naked newsboys in the waters of Lake Michigan flashed across his mind.

"Eleven is the bathing hour at the Breakers. If you happened to be over that way——"

He seized the cue.

"I'll be there," then hastily, "Guess I'd better go back to the hotel and unpack a few things."

She walked around the house with him to the great iron gate fronting Lake Worth. For a moment they stood in silence; then he turned impulsively.

"I don't want you to think me a fool, rushing here from California to renew an acquaintance made and ended in sixty seconds half a year ago——"

He paused and looked at her, his face serious.

"No use dodging the issue, though. Just one thing brought me here. You know what that was if you ever look in a mirror. It was you! Even if you hadn't remembered me, had refused to speak, I'd have got a sight of you one way or another, and that would have repaid me for the trip. Sounds like nonsense, doesn't it?"

Unconsciously she shook her head in negation. He continued slowly and softly, tempering the great force behind his words with a simple, deep, reverent sincerity:

"Now, I'm here; you've remembered me. But it's only fair to warn you now. The way to prevent a big fire is to put it out when it's a little one——" his voice shook, "and if what I feel is a 'little fire,' God help me when it grows big. So don't wait 'til

it's too late." Then abruptly, "Pardon me—I'm talking too much—I'm rude."

"You're not," contradicted Rosalie, and blushed the moment the two words passed her lips.

For a moment they stood gazing into each other's eyes. Then drawn by some force stronger than himself, he gently placed both hands upon the girl's slender shoulders. The contact was electric—naturally and unconsciously he leaned forward and kissed her full upon the lips—and in the kiss was untold worlds of tenderness. The whole city might have been watching for all that either of them cared.

She stood a second quivering, then turned and fled into the house, up the stairs to the boudoir of her Aunt Helen, who, between puffs of a rank Virginia cigarette, sat up in her silken bed spinning a miniature roulette wheel and recording the results on a figure-covered sheet.

"Well, well, what's wrong with you, child?" Aunt Helen swept aside the everlasting gamblers' problem for the never-ending human one.

"I—I'm going swimming," burst out Rosalie, and almost simultaneously with this startling confession came a flood of tears.

"How terrible. And you're going to cry a little salt ocean of your own? Stop it! Why are you going crying—I mean going swimming—oh, damn it! Rosalie, honey, what *is* the matter?"

## XVIII

### RELAXATION AT PALM BEACH

THERE was a new spring in Dave's step as he swung rapidly down the drive toward the hotel. Shapiro caught sight of him as he cut in across the lawn to the steps of the Ponciana and turned to the man he had been talking to.

"Here he is now, Carruthers."

The other looked interestedly at the approaching Power, who responded to the lawyer's hail.

"I say, Power, come over a moment, will you? I want you to meet Mr. Carruthers."

Dave shot a quick glance at the newcomer. He was tall and inclined to be corpulent and although his greyed hair and moustache conveyed an impression of dignity, perpetual laughter welled in his blue eyes.

"Glad to know you, sir," said Dave simply. "Shapiro—can I get a bathing suit around here and what is 'the Breakers'?"

"You can get your bathing suit at one of the stores in the hotel lobby; the Breakers is a big hotel back of this one—there's a beach by it, if that's what you're driving at, and eleven o'clock is the usual bathing hour."

Carruthers had been watching Dave. The laughter which had been momentarily replaced by a razor-keen glance returned as he spoke:

"Come, come, Shapiro, you don't know the first

thing about hospitality. Instead of telling your guest where things are and how to get them, why don't you guide him? Evidently he's going to join the undress parade on the beach. Let's go with him—I haven't had a swim for two years and I'll bet you haven't been out of reach of the sides of a bathtub since you've had money enough to make the prospect of death unpleasant."

Dave was too jubilant to resent it, so he gracefully submitted to the ministrations of his two companions. The eleven o'clock hour found all three on the beach at the Breakers.

The awninged chairs were filled with people; bored, interested, distinguished, bourgeois, noblesse; some attractively and all expensively attired. And as for the men and women on the beach, the real thing looked more like a musical comedy reproduction than the mimicry itself.

But Dave had no eyes for the throng; he was looking for one particular person. As he stood gazing about, his broad white shoulders and finely poised head formed a distinct contrast to the variegated specimens of manhood about him. Veiled glances of half invitation wended their way from several fair quarters. Both Shapiro and Carruthers noted this. The latter spoke softly:

"Power, if you only had 'Life Saver' on your shirt, I think there'd be a female rush around here to hurry up and get in danger."

Pleasantries came so naturally from Carruthers that they carried no offence. Dave laughed but made no reply. He was still searching the beach for Rosalie when Carruthers spoke again:

"I'll ease your mind. Go and look for her. She's here all right. Everybody is at this time."

"All right, Mr. Mind Reader—see you later," and Dave disappeared in the crowd. Carruthers turned to the lawyer.

"Lie down in the sand, Shapiro. I'm going to cover you up and scandalize Palm Beach."

Shapiro grinned delightedly.

"All right, Charley. We'll probably spoil the pleasure of everybody within eyeshot—but anything you say goes."

"Milton, here is the real way to enjoy yourself," commented Carruthers, as he looked around for a favourable site for his operations, "by covering you up with sand, by behaving like a couple of Coney Island trippers, we automatically offend the sight and wreck the dignity of the fools who think that posing is the world's greatest sport. And by making them thoroughly uncomfortable we please ourselves and thereby recreate." By this time he was industriously and artistically placing a first layer of damp sand over the lawyer's prostrate form, to the great demoralization of a nearby group who were trying in vain to maintain an air of hauteur and utter boredom. A sudden inspiration struck the builder. "Keep real still now and I'll put up a Grant's Tomb on your stomach."

"It's coming without being built," rejoined Shapiro luxuriously. "Keep that sand out of my eyes, will you?"

Under a gaily coloured awning, Helen Ainsworth sat near the Breakers pier, an entirely superfluous sunshade over her shoulder, and at her feet in a

simple boyish bathing suit, Rosalie idly sifted the clean white sand through her taper fingers.

"You've got some reason for wanting to come down here today," commented Aunt Helen pettishly, "and here I let you drag me away from the wheel with hours of work ahead before I complete my calculations for tonight's play. I hope your 'reason' isn't one of these scarecrows. Men should keep their clothes on—women, too, for that matter. Individual bathing beaches would go a long way toward making us think that sculptors really worked from living models. There—look over there—why don't all men look like that?"

Rosalie followed her aunt's glance and beheld David Power. At the same moment he saw her and turned.

The introduction was made and Dave dropped lithely down on the beach, keenly aware of Helen Ainsworth's appraising glance. He purposely seated himself facing her. If there was to be a duel, he wanted to see his opponent.

To himself he thought: "About forty—by the look of her eye smarter than a woman has any right to be—more beautiful today than most women half her age—good taste in dress, too—not different enough to be conspicuous, just enough to be different." Which was a good off-hand tabloid portrait of Helen Ainsworth.

"Do you swim or are you merely an *objet d'art?*" was Aunt Helen's first shot.

"Both," replied Dave easily.

"Hm—I see." Silence for a moment, then:

"Are you in business?"

"Certainly."

"What business?"

"The best one: making money."

"Successful?"

"Once in a while," and then Dave tiring of the interrogations began to parry in his own peculiar fashion.

"Mrs. Ainsworth, why don't you ask me if two and two make four?"

"Because I already know that."

"Certainly you do. And you 'already know' all there is to be known about any man without asking—they're all alike, aren't they? Why single me out for cross-examination when you know all the answers beforehand?"

She looked sharply at him, then laughed. Friendly relations were established. A long, loud, exaggerating cough made the three look up. Carruthers was standing there simulating utter boredom.

"Why, Charley Carruthers!" Helen was surprised. "I never saw you in a bathing suit before; you look exactly like a tall Brownie."

"What do you know about Brownies, Helen Ainsworth?" retorted Carruthers. "When other little girls were reading Louisa Alcott and laughing at Palmer Cox's pictures, you were figuring out the value of poker hands and estimating the house percentage on *trente et quarante*. What do you think of a female with that kind of mind, Power?"

"You people are too personal for me," laughed Dave, rising to his feet. "Guess I'll get out before something embarrassing happens." Turning to Rosalie, "Care to take a dip?"

As the pair disappeared in the ocean, Helen Ainsworth turned quickly to Carruthers.

"Charley, who is he? Where's he from? What is he? Is it all right for Rosalie? Tell me—quick!"

Carruthers yawned: "Yes, to all your questions, Helen. He's from the West—Los Angeles way. Shapiro says he's a money-making wonder. Got the instinct and ability both. Certainly he's all right for Rosalie. I'll pass him on Shapiro's recommendation."

"All right. I want to know more about him but that will do for the present. You know, Rosalie is such a queer child. She's more like a nun than a society girl and really doesn't know what the word flirtation means. I won't have any devilish good-for-nothing carrying her off if I can help it."

"This Power is different from the rest of the crowd she knows—I'd be inclined to say he's a lot better, if my judgment is worth anything," said Carruthers as he slyly sifted some dry sand into Mrs. Ainsworth's pump. She rapped him smartly on the ear with one able hand.

"Stop it! Won't you ever grow up? You were always like that. How such a big tomfool has ever made the money they say you have is entirely beyond me." Then thoughtfully: "Do you know, Charley, I have a habit of either liking or disliking people at first meeting. And nine times out of ten when I try to temper my first opinion by after judgment, I go wrong—make mistakes. And I instinctively liked that man the moment I laid eyes on him."

"What was your first impression of me?" questioned Carruthers lazily.

"Let's see. You were quite young. Oh, yes, I remember: I thought you perfect—a perfect ass."

"Thanks," rejoined Carruthers drily.

Out in the ocean swam Dave and Rosalie. It was a calm day and the exhilaration of the salt water counteracted the warm air and hot sunshine. Both swam well. Surely and easily Dave led the way out and then turned parallel with the shore. When he suggested landing they were well beyond the crowded beach.

As they waded up the long stretch of shallows, Dave noted the cling of the boyish bathing suit—its wet silk outlining the figure it covered with the mystery that conceals yet reveals. He wanted to put his arms around her and feel hers around him—and yet strangely enough it was much the same spirit in which we would have liked to fondle a beautiful child mixed with an undercurrent of something deeper and stronger, yet withal pure and clean.

Rosalie pulled off her bathing cap and shook down her hair to dry. He lazed out on the beach and for a full twenty minutes neither spoke beyond monosyllables, yet both felt at rest and ease—a sense of contentment in the mere nearness of each other. She broke the spell by suggesting a return and he silently arose and accompanied her down the beach.

"May I see you again today?" he asked before they reached their party.

She shook her head—now it was she who wanted to be alone and think. "In the morning," she suggested, and with this Dave had to be content.

When the two women arrived at the big house on the Drive, Aunt Helen turned to Rosalie with a queer tightening of her well-shaped mouth.

"Sit down a moment," she suggested. "I want to talk with you."

Obediently Rosalie dropped on a small stool at the foot of the great davenport and looked admiringly at her aunt.

"Dear," she said softly, "you grow more beautiful every day."

"Hush, stop, that kind of talk would come all right from some man as idle nonsense, but from a girl it can only mean one thing, that you have something to hide. A woman always tries to conceal things from another woman under a cloak of compliments."

She reached out her hand and patted the girl gently on the head. For a moment there was silence —Aunt Helen waited patiently until Rosalie finally looked up.

"Aunt Helen," she said, "I think—I think—it's he!"

"You mean this man, Power?"

The girl nodded. Another period of silence, broken finally by the older woman.

"What makes you think so?"

"I don't just exactly know. I met him first in Los Angeles—only for a moment—but it seemed as if my whole life changed—as if up to that time it had been aimless and then suddenly, I had found a goal. And afterwards, since then, I've thought about him—wondered—dreamed. Why, when they told me he was here this morning it seemed the most

natural thing in the world. And he came because he felt the same way that I did. Tell me, Auntie, is this wrong, can it be wrong?"

Helen Ainsworth spoke slowly and thoughtfully.

"No, it isn't wrong. The wrong thing would be to suppress it; that is, if you're certain——"

"I am."

"How about young Gillette?"

"I liked him—lots," answered Rosalie truthfully, "and still do. But this is different. I don't know how to describe it. With him I was just a girl—nothing serious—nothing deep—but when I met David Power he made me realize that I was a woman and I felt it right down to the depths of the soul I never knew I owned before."

"You talk like Laura Jean Libbey," interrupted Mrs. Ainsworth sharply. "Still, you're a sensible girl—as girls go." She mused, "So he 'wakened your soul.' I don't know. Charley Carruthers says the man is all right. At any rate, Power is a regular he-person and that's something. The whole thing is sudden, but," with quick resolution, "follow your feelings, girl; they'll lead you right."

Furtively her hand caressed the girl's hair. Her voice softened as when one speaks of things sacred.

"You're greatly like your mother. I sometimes think she still lives, in you. Beauty, mentality, sincerity. Rosalie, dear, your mother, were she alive, would have approved of this man. I know it."

And she leaned impulsively forward and kissed the girl on her cheek. Rosalie's face was aglow. She flung her arms around the other woman's neck and smothered her in a good old-fashioned embrace.

"Now, now," said Helen Ainsworth querulously, "you needn't be too grateful to me—if I were ten years younger, I think I'd have given you competition instead of advice. I like that man pretty well myself. Power—he's rightly named."

# XIX

## DAVID HAS A HEART

BACK at the hotel, Shapiro sat at the writing desk opening mail which had already begun to arrive from New York.

Dave, restless and exuberant, strode down the several rooms which comprised their suite, his hands in his pockets and head held high. Once he sought his bedchamber and started to take out the violin, but reconsidered and picked up a magazine instead.

He seated himself in a chair, poised his feet on the window sill and tried to read. A remark from Shapiro proved a welcome interruption.

"Power,"—the lawyer was writing busily,—"if you ever have a partner that's really smart, take my advice and keep him at all costs."

"Why?"

"Simply because if you don't, he's going to be a competitor of yours eventually and competitors that know your business are really dangerous."

Dave looked contemplatively out of the window over the waving palm tops at the cloudless sky. "What put business back in your head here in the playgrounds, your mail?"

Shapiro shifted his chair around and adjusted it so that he, too, could enjoy Dave's view.

"Yes, my mail. The thing Carruthers and I

have been expecting for six months has happened. And the fact that it's not a surprise doesn't take one bit of the sting out."

Dave waited; his companion was in a talking mood.

"You've heard of Emmerson?" The lawyer paused inquiringly and Dave nodded. "Well, he has been a partner of ours for years—brilliant fellow; brain like a steel trap, closes right in on everything of value that comes along. About a year ago, he began to disagree with us on policy matters, to quibble about little things. Carruthers put his finger on the spot—said that Emmerson was getting ready to quit. Sure enough, pretty soon he began to unload his holdings and six months ago came the open split."

"And now——?"

"Now he has done the thing we knew he would. This letter I just read informs me that Emmerson has started a new steel company in direct competition with some of our weakest holdings. Got it financed—money practically in the bank—all ready to bite his former partners in the pocketbook." The lawyer paused and then added with a tinge of bitterness: "And if it hadn't been for us, Emmerson would still be the superintendent of a steel mill at a few thousand dollars a year."

Dave looked at him in surprise.

"Is it a disappointment in the man or anticipation of trouble?" he asked.

"Purely the latter," answered Shapiro. "I'm through being disappointed in men. I never expect anything any more."

"Hm——" Dave took his feet off the sill and placed them solidly on the floor; then stood up and looked out of the window.

"It seems to me," he said, "that there isn't much there to be afraid of, with the means at your command."

"You don't understand." The other man shifted his chair back to the desk. "This fellow knows our business as well as his own. He's going to attack our weak points. There'll be a price war—big losses; then, either he'll sell out to us or we'll have to make terms with him that will let both of us go along and make money. In plain English, Emmerson is trying to horn in on our game, and he's just smart enough to do it. Carruthers and I are both agreed on that."

Dave picked up his hat. "Well, if I were in your place, Shapiro, I believe I'd have an idea."

"Well, put yourself in my place then," suggested the lawyer.

"Perhaps I will," and Dave walked slowly out of the room, turning over in his mind a wild idea sparked into being by Shapiro's words.

Shortly after the door closed on Dave, Carruthers opened it and lounged in the easy chair by the window.

"Give me a cigarette, Milt." He helped himself to one from the open box. "What's new in the mail today?"

"Emmerson's shown his hand; he's opening up. The fight will soon be on."

Carruthers drummed a moment; then drew in and exhaled a great cloud of smoke and changed the

subject. To his mind, the lawyer's few words had told it all.

"Where's Power?" he asked abruptly.

"Gone for a walk."

"Do you know, there's something up between him and that Rogers girl. I'll certainly have to compliment him on his taste. Helen Ainsworth started to cross-examine me down on the beach and she isn't the kind of woman to talk fire if she doesn't smell smoke."

"I certainly hope you gave him a good send-off," commented Shapiro without looking up.

"Why shouldn't I?" rejoined Carruthers. "You recommend him; he looks good to me; he certainly isn't a fortune hunter."

"Far from it," said the lawyer sincerely. "Doesn't have to be—he can make it. Can this Mrs. Ainsworth help him?"

"Say, she can do anything in the world she wants to, except beat a roulette wheel. Absolutely the smartest woman in America, Shapiro, and don't you ever forget it. Want to play in a foursome this afternoon?"

"I should say not—much too hot for golf."

"All right, guess the foursome will be a three-some then. See you later on that Emmerson matter." And Carruthers arose and lazily removed himself from the rooms.

His mail carefully locked away, Shapiro repaired to the porch and was finally joined by Power, white dust on his shoes and trousers showing that he had taken a walk away from the beaten paths. Shapiro looked up as he seated himself.

"Well, Power," he said half joking, half serious, "you said you might put yourself in my place and dig up a real idea on our friend, Emmerson. How about it? Got the scheme all doped out?"

"Yes!" Dave's monosyllabic reply was simple and matter of fact.

"I suppose," suggested the lawyer slyly, "that you have not only figured out how to keep him off our toes but make a lot of money doing it."

"Exactly that," said Dave, and suddenly realizing how assured his statements must sound to the other, he laughed. "Anyway, Shapiro, sound or unsound, good or bad, I've got an idea."

"Shoot. I'm listening."

"Wait a while. I want to work it out a little more," and the subject was dropped for the time being.

As the sun began to set, Carruthers returned from his golf game, tired, hot and decidedly out of sorts.

"Gentlemen, yesterday I shot perfect golf; I felt myself a champion; today as I stood at the first tee I felt the mastery of the white pill swell within me; and now at the conclusion of nineteen rotten holes and one hundred and ten dubbed shots, I admit defeat. But one thing I have discovered."

"All of which," said Shapiro idly, "leads to the necessary rejoinder. And what, Mr. Carruthers, have you discovered?"

"Just this: that the game of golf is like a female, an unscrupulous, fascinating woman who, when you think you have her, evades your arms and turns a cold shoulder on your ardour and thereby holds you in her spell forever."

"As a golf shooter of nine years' bad standing," remarked Shapiro, rising, "I will say that you occasionally spring a bit of common sense that surprises me. Let's go and eat."

And the three repaired to their rooms to dress for dinner.

Excusing himself, Dave left his companions at the door of the elevator and stood a moment debating. Rosalie had said she would not see him before the morrow but no restrictions had been laid on the use of the telephone. He strolled over to the booth, looked her number up in the little book and lifted the receiver off the hook.

When he stepped out after a full fifteen minutes of conversation he wore the air of a man in the seventh heaven of delight. This was so unusual for David Power that his companions noticed it at dinner and hazarded shrewd speculations as to the cause.

After a few cigars on the veranda, Carruthers suggested the Polo Club. Dave had never heard of the institution but assented without betraying his ignorance, and the three strolled down the long drive, finally arriving at a spacious white frame house, large and cool in the bright tropic moonlight.

The negro who took their sticks and hats at the front door ushered them into an elaborately furnished lounge, opening on a brilliantly lighted space as large and capacious as any ballroom in the country.

Dave drew his breath. It was a gambling house, the most elaborately furnished and fitted he had ever dreamed of.

The three strolled into the room and Carruthers bought a stack of chips and dropped on a carved stool in front of a roulette wheel; Shapiro followed suit. As Dave stood behind them, half undecided, he caught a glimpse of a familiar face at the table opposite—it was Mrs. Ainsworth. He slowly walked around.

The evening was young, only a sprinkling of players were about. Aunt Helen had selected a table where she could be by herself and with a piece of violet note paper covered with banks of figures, combined with the contents of a gold mesh bag, was engaged in the pleasant task of trying to make system beat chance.

Dave stood silently behind her. As the croupier raked in a starred wager, she feeling the presence of another, half glanced up in annoyance; but seeing that it was Dave, her face cleared and she spoke.

"Sit down, Mr. Power. Perhaps you'll bring me luck."

Dave dropped easily into the stool by her side. "Winning?" he asked.

"No!" Her face clouded. "Losing. Every time I get the averages worked out, or think I do, they seem to change."

"I have always understood that the theory of all system is based on doubled bets to offset losses—the bank limit beats one. That's what it's there for."

"Not when you play the Rosseau Starring System." And Aunt Helen plunged into an eager explanation of one of the world-old schemes that never work, punctuating her remarks with occasional bets

which invariably landed in the check rack by the dealer's hands.

Dave listened for a time in respectful silence.

"Mrs. Ainsworth," he said, "have you ever heard of the Chambeau System?" Though his face was serious there was a little twinkle in his eye. "It's very little known in this country."

"No, I haven't," she replied truthfully, which was not remarkable since the "Chambeau" had been born in Dave's brain but a second before. "How does it operate?"

"Instead of telling you, I'll demonstrate it." Dave turned her paper over and made a series of rapid calculations resulting in a row of seven figures. He then purchased a stack of chips and placed a major bet on the double o, at the same time showing Mrs. Ainsworth the first figure of his calculations.

The wheel spun steadily as the little ball ricochetted around and finally settled in the compartment marked "oo."

"Luck!" commented Mrs. Ainsworth scornfully.

He smiled and covered a fresh series of numbers.

Again the white ball settled into a niche that corresponded to one of his wagers. Again he gathered in fresh stacks of chips.

Aunt Helen was interested. One finger thoughtfully against the side of her lips, she watched, attention personified.

Another series of bets; another winning. Again he showed the piece of paper, proving that the winning number had been pre-determined. By this time his audience was little short of fascinated.

A few minor losses; finally his seventh wager won, he pushed the chips across the table, pocketed his winnings and turned to Mrs. Ainsworth.

"Well," he smiled, "what do you think of the 'Chambeau' system?"

"Wonderful," she breathed. "Tell me how it is done."

"Why do you think it is good?"

"Because you won."

"All right; I haven't any system at all. I made a series of bogus calculations and jotted down the first numbers that came into my mind. If I had lost, my 'system' wouldn't have interested you—only the fact that I won made it good. The only 'system' in the world is plain, everyday 'blind' luck; and the house percentage beats that—every time."

A smile slowly dawned over Helen Ainsworth's countenance. "I see: the joke is on me; teaching a system player a little lesson. Well, I accept the moral but refuse to profit by it." She arose from the stool and faced him. "I want to talk with you for a few moments privately. That divan in the corner seems secluded. Shall we go over there?"

He assented and they seated themselves a little apart from the crowd. Slowly Mrs. Ainsworth tore the piece of paper bearing her calculations to small bits, dropped them carelessly on the floor, then looked up and spoke.

"What brought you to Palm Beach?"

Intuition told him to deal frankly with her. He looked her square in the eyes as he made answer.

"Rosalie Rogers."

She considered for a moment. His frankness pleased her, his gaze gave her confidence in what lay behind. Finally she spoke again.

"What kind of man are you? Don't ask me what I mean, don't fence, tell me what I want to know."

What was the use of dissembling? She was Rosalie's aunt and in her eyes he read a lurking friendliness that bade him play fair and receive like treatment.

"That's a hard question to answer but I'll try—that is," he was speaking very slowly, "I'll try to tell you what you want to know." Suddenly he found the words: "I'm the kind of man who never changes his mind once he makes it up. I've got respect for those who justify it—and something else—something more for the only person I've ever met who aroused it within me and that last something never can and never will die."

Helen Ainsworth bit her lips—not the words but the way he spoke reminded her of someone passed and gone—instinctively she reached out and patted his hand.

"That's enough," she sighed. "I'm getting old and foolish to ask questions like that and expect an answer. I guess I'll go home. Will you come over and see us in the morning if you have time?"

And as she left the room, Dave knew he had a strong ally in Helen Ainsworth.

He sat on the divan thinking, a glow of satisfaction and peace permeating his being. The one thing life had shown him that he felt was really worth the having and the battling for was in his

grasp. And how easily it had come—almost without effort! After all, isn't that the way things do come—of themselves? Doesn't chance more often lead to great acquirement than strife and struggle?

Excusing himself to his companions, who were still engrossed in the wheel, he walked slowly to the hotel, sought his room and took out his precious violin. Regardless of other guests, heedless of anything and everything, he softly drew the bow across the strings and gave vent to the things that were in his soul. Looking out of the open window at the starry sky he played, low, impelling strains.

The soul of him was in tune with the soul of the violin and the music he played was a miscellany of what he had heard and what he felt. Finally—almost exhausted with emotion, he laid the violin upon the bed and sighed. A deprecatory cough from the open door to the next room brought him suddenly back to life. Startled he turned—it was Shapiro.

"Man, that's magic music you played." A new note of respect was in the lawyer's voice.

For a moment Dave hesitated—like all strong men he felt shamed of showing emotion and he knew that his violin playing had laid bare his very soul—but the evident awe and admiration of his auditor, the bond of mutual love of music broke the shackles of convention and restraint.

"I'm glad you liked it," he said simply.

Shapiro advanced into the room.

"Would you mind playing some more?" His request came oddly enough like that of a child's pleading.

"I am afraid," said Dave, "it is late—it might annoy someone." The lawyer's look of deep disappointment touched something within him; impulsively he picked up the bow and struck the opening note of a wild Hungarian piece he had heard the orchestra play that night.

And though he held the chords to a soft cadence, the wild thrill of the barbaric rhythm was there, the melody, the contrasts of calm and passion. The other's hands clenched and unclenched in a wild rapture of enjoyment. Not until nearly three o'clock did their debauch of music end.

In the morning, both rather guiltily anticipated complaints about their concert but had they only known, inquiries as to the identity of the violin maestro who sojourned there were the only references to the affair that came to the ears of the hotel management.

Rosalie Rogers anticipated an early caller. And despite a little inward feeling of trepidation she wandered to the pergola on the side of the house which commanded a full view of the drive from the hotel. She was not disappointed, for David Power arrived bright and early. And she emerged from her concealment and saved him the trouble of using the big brass door knocker.

He looked down at her and smiled. How peculiar it was—when he was away from her he would have sworn that it was an impossibility to be more deeply in love, yet the moment he entered her presence, the impossibility became a fact and he experienced new depths of emotion.

After which profound conclusions he made a commonplace remark.

"Well, here I am, are you ready?"

"Ready—for what?"

"I've chartered a boat and we're going to cruise around a little."

Neglecting to mention the fact that they had a private yacht of their own anchored off the water front, Rosalie ran into the house, swept a gay coloured sweater and tam off a hook, left word of her whereabouts for Mrs. Ainsworth and embarked in a somewhat dingy thirty-footer at the Ponciana pier.

"How long are we going to be gone?" she asked as the boat glided smoothly away.

"I don't know—in fact, I don't care—do you?"

"I guess not," she admitted. And the three hours that followed passed like three minutes. They were on their way back when the crisis came.

Dave sat upright on his reed chair and lifted it around so he faced her squarely. He spoke slowly and solemnly.

"Rosalie Rogers, I, David Power, do hereby ask you to become my lawful wedded wife!" Then with a rush: "Will you please?"

It was the expected—but Rosalie choked back a terrible temptation to say the hackneyed, "This is so sudden," and looked seriously into his eyes.

"Why?"

"Because I love you!" Dave's simple, unaffected answer was an epitome of sincerity.

"Do you want me if I don't care for you?" Rosalie's eyes were big and sparkling as stars.

Seriously Dave Power made answer:

"No, I do not. No matter how much I care for you, the knowledge that you didn't care for me would hurt more than my love could heal. And I know you—only one thing could make you say 'Yes' and that one thing is what I want back of the 'Yes' I get."

She clasped her hands nervously together.

"But do you think we know each other well enough—why—hardly two days."

He interrupted her almost rudely.

"Know each other well enough? Why, girl, this isn't a matter of acquaintance—it's love. Time to study others is the creation of slow-minded people whose mental eyes are blind; the moment I saw you I knew you—you knew me—ten thousand years won't tell us more about each other. Girl," there was a world of tenderness in his tone, "I'm asking you to marry me and waiting for your answer."

The woman in Rosalie made her hesitate and parry still.

"What will you do if I don't answer—just now?"

Dave thought for a second.

"I'll know then that you're going to say 'No.' You're the first woman I've ever asked and God knows you'll be the last unless I find another just like you. And this I'll warrant—say 'No' and I'll never bother you."

She interrupted him—the flood of her emotions swept away age-old trainings of restraint and conventions; she spoke slowly and softly, her eyes cast down but her words as clear as crystal.

"It's—yes."

And with the word he leaned forward and took her face between his two hands and looked deep into her two eyes as he spoke.

"When I kissed you yesterday it was presumption; now, it's my right," and with the words the bargain was sealed.

So the impossible came easily to pass—as if it were the most natural thing in the world. One of the richest girls in America, after a bare thirty hours' courtship, plighting her troth to the man from nowhere and doing it as proudly and happily as if he were a king.

It was high noon when their summer barque made its moorings again and the two sought the grey stone house on the drive where Helen Ainsworth occupied Rosalie's morning seat in the pergola and greeted the late arrivals with a severe look.

"Where have you been?"

Disregarding her question, Dave walked slowly up, Rosalie by his side, and deliberately took the girl's hand in his.

"Aunt Helen," he said, "Rosalie has promised to be my wife."

"Your wife, my God!" Aunt Helen's four words came in one breath.

"My wife—my God," breathed Dave softly in Rosalie's ear.

Aunt Helen had regained her composure.

"Sit down, you two, and let me look at you—your father away in California—of all the outlandish things." She turned suddenly to Dave. "Give me a cigarette—I've got to think!" He complied. The live ash was almost to Mrs. Ainsworth's finger

tips before she threw the smoking stub away and spoke again.

"Well, one thing I'm satisfied of—this is a love match. If you were a fortune hunter you'd have used a lot more diplomacy than you've taken the trouble to exert—and you wouldn't have told me about it so soon.

"You hardly know each other, but I guess that doesn't make much difference. Most of the people who've known each other all their lives were as well acquainted the first day they met as they are right now.

"You take my breath away, you two." She rose suddenly. "But it's all right, I'll get it back." She turned and looked tenderly at them. "I'm a sentimental old fool, but God bless and keep both of you!" And there were real tears in Helen Ainsworth's eyes. "Better leave your father to me, Rosalie—don't say anything to him until I tell you to."

And with a distinct sniff she turned and left the pergola.

# XX

## DAVID INSTRUCTS CAPTAINS OF INDUSTRY

AT five o'clock that afternoon, Dave joined Carruthers and Shapiro on the veranda of the Breakers. Shapiro greeted him cordially, a memory of the music of the night before in his voice.

"Where have you been all day? Sit down and have a drink."

"Carruthers interrupted before Dave could reply, "None of your business where he has been."

Shapiro laughed and Dave dropped casually into a chair.

"I suppose it isn't any of my business at that," Shapiro laughed. "By the way, have you done any more thinking about that idea you said you had yesterday—about Emmerson and competition, you know?"

"Yes, I've got it pretty well planned out." He looked shrewdly at Carruthers. "And even it if doesn't strike you as a good idea, it'll give you a good laugh."

"Oh, don't mind him," and the lawyer smiled at Carruthers; "he laughs as a matter of habit, not because he means it."

"All right. Here goes!" Dave looked at the dancing couples on the floor of the Cocoanut Grove below; then shifted his gaze to the blue waters of

the lake. "To put it very plainly and bluntly, you are afraid that this ex-partner of yours, Emmerson, is going to play the devil with your profits—start a little steel war. And if possible, you want to head him off. Right?"

Shapiro nodded. Carruthers chewed his cigar a second and then spoke: "What's your brilliant idea, Power, to compromise before he does any damage, make our peace with him before he gets under way?"

Dave shifted to a more comfortable position. "If that was my idea, which it isn't," he said, "I'd keep it to myself. You're not the compromising kind. No, I've got a different angle."

"Well, what is it?" asked Shapiro a trifle impatiently. Carruthers said nothing but there was a glint of interest in his eyes. Power had a way of making you feel that there was something behind his words.

"It's so simple you may have thought of it yourself." And then Dave dropped his fencing and struck boldly at the heart of the situation. "You say Emmerson is going to fight; why don't you fellows start a new company expressly for his entertainment? You know where his plant is going to be; you know the business he is going after; let your new company parallel his plans, and then while he has his hands full fighting the competitor you create for him, your old companies can go right along making money without trouble or interference."

Shapiro's comment came sharp and short: "And lose a million dollars doing it."

"Not lose—you used the wrong word, *make* a

million," rejoined Dave with a smile. Carruthers, still silent, looked curiously at him.

"I don't follow your manner of figuring."

"It isn't my figuring; it's yours." Dave leaned back in his chair. "You told me on the train that the way to make money was to take something that cost nothing but looked like a lot, capitalize it at a big sum, sell the stock to the public and pocket the difference between what it cost and what you got. You see, I remember your recipe for getting rich."

Carruthers turned his head away to hide a slight smile.

The lawyer looked at him, then turned his glance back to Dave. "I see; make a stock jobbing proposition of it." He stopped for a moment and turned the matter over in his mind. "But it isn't a practical idea. We would simply be competing with ourselves as well as Emmerson, making matters worse, instead of better."

"Of course, Mr. Shapiro, I know nothing of the steel business," Dave was speaking slowly and cutting his words short, "but it does seem to me that there are different qualities of steel, just as there are different qualities and grades of every other product under the sun. And if your new company made a little lower grade than you do—and consequently possessed a price advantage to start with—and if, the new company being secretly under your control, it competed solely and exclusively with the Emmerson outfit and withdrew on one pretext or another when it went up against your present companies—well?"

Shapiro shook his head and started to speak, "It isn't practical——" Carruthers interrupted him almost rudely.

"Don't be a fool, Milt. You're doing the same thing we used to laugh at others for. You're sticking to the beaten path—the old hard-shell policy of never taking a chance and letting the other fellow do the gambling. Power hasn't got a new idea. With apologies to him, he simply used common sense and reminded us that what has worked once will work again. So far as I'm concerned, I'm going to give the idea serious consideration."

Shapiro looked at his companion in amazement. Carruthers, the man financiers credited with almost second sight, taking up the cudgels in behalf of a buccaneering, half-baked scheme like this. And yet, so great was his respect for his companion, that he too began to reconsider.

"Who could handle the promotion?" he asked.

"You people are already well known in the steel business," suggested Dave.

"Well known as practical pirates, you mean," corrected Carruthers. "No, that wouldn't do—for several reasons. If the new company is designed to act as our fortification against Emmerson, we hadn't better be known in it."

"There are plenty of people we can get back of it," commented Shapiro.

Carruthers stood up straight and shoved both hands deep in his pockets. "I think," he said slowly, "that it's about time we used someone beside the well-known burglar crew—the public is getting wiser every day. We need a new man—a man

with ability and common sense." Dave thought he detected a sidewise glance at himself but was not sure.

And so the matter was dropped for a while, but late that night the steel man took occasion to remark privately to Shapiro that Power had an unusual mind, which from him was a high compliment.

# XXI

## INVADER STEEL

THE three men usually breakfasted together—all were early risers. One morning a bell-boy brought a telegram to Carruthers. As he handed it to Shapiro, his one word comment spoke volumes.

"Damn!" he said briefly and expressively.

Shapiro read the telegram twice and then laid it on the table.

"Well, what's the difference?" he asked quietly.

"I guess there isn't any difference—it's all right," commented Carruthers wearily. "Only something's always happening at that blasted Carboville outfit." He turned apologetically to Dave. "We've got one of the biggest and most modern steel plants in the country at Carboville—a separate corporation from the rest—and it's lost money for us every month it's been running. Regular hoodoo, that's what it is. Always something happening. This wire advised me that our President—chap at the head of the Carboville Mills Corporation—just resigned in disgust."

"In disgust and incompetence you mean," remarked Shapiro.

"I guess that's it," assented Carruthers.

"What appears to be wrong?" questioned Dave. These breakfast business conversations had become

a matter of course and he by this time had developed the habit of joining in as freely as if he were a third partner.

"Not getting out enough steel, that's what's wrong; costs us too much for what we are producing," explained Carruthers. "If it were one of the rickety old plants, I could find an excuse, but here's the best-equipped, best-manned outfit we've got falling behind all the rest. It's enough to make a saint sore."

"You said it was the 'best manned' outfit you've got——" prompted Dave.

"It costs us enough for management—it ought to be," snapped Carruthers. "It's loaded to the guards with high-priced experts on chemistry, experts on factory organization, cost statisticians, engineers, experts on everything that has anything to do with the business."

Dave tested the melon before him and found it good.

"Got a lot of experts down there, have you?"

"Yep," Carruthers also approved of the melon and his face relaxed.

"Say, Mr. Carruthers, I'm going to show ignorance—what's the most important factor in the making of steel, machinery or labour?"

"Men, of course, equipment is much the same in all plants. It's what the labour does that counts."

"Hm," Dave looked up innocently, "I wonder if you might not have overlooked putting in an 'expert on men' in that plant of yours."

Carruthers pushed away his melon and looked at Power in amazement. His lightning mind re-

viewed Carboville in a flash—he turned to Shapiro.

"Well, for a couple of plain chumps I recommend you and myself. Why, there isn't and there never has been anybody at the head of that plant who could make men work with all there was in them. That's where our weakness has been."

Shapiro scribbled on the telegram and handed it across to Carruthers. The latter read the message and turned to Dave.

"Do you know what your legal friend just wrote on this piece of paper?"

Dave shook his head.

"He says, 'Why not give Power a chance at Carboville?' I'm agreeable. How about you?"

The suddenness of the thing brought Dave up with a shock.

"What kind of a chance?"

"We've just lost our President. That job's open —twenty-five thousand a year to start, as much or as little work as you please, just as long as you get costs down and production up, you'll earn your salary."

"Mr. Carruthers, I don't even know what steel is made of, but if it's a matter of getting out of the men all there is in them, that I can do."

"You diagnosed the case a while ago as man-trouble so I guess you'll fill the bill. What do you think, Milton?"

"Sure, he will. Now, Power, two of the three directors of Carboville have voted to make you President. What do you say?" He looked for the waiter. "Another slice of melon, please."

"Certainly, I'll accept the presidency," answered

Dave. "Here, waiter—I'll have some more melon too."

"Make it three," chimed in Carruthers.

And in such an exceedingly informal and careless manner was David Power, erstwhile medicine man, elected to a twenty-five-thousand-dollar position of grave responsibility. Truly large business puts no more of a cloak of ceremony nor impressiveness about its dealings than the delicatessen shop on the corner.

The date for return to New York was set for a week later. Carruthers and Shapiro extended a cordial invitation to David Power to be their guest on the private car, *Myra*, making it plain that his company was desired from a business as well as a social standpoint.

Dave, seeing opportunity writ large in Carboville, was anxious to put his hand to the plough. With the certainty of Rosalie came the necessity of a fixed position and he felt that lingering in Palm Beach, pleasant as the hours would be, was not consistent with his new ambitions. And anyway, it was only a matter of ten days or more before Rosalie and her aunt planned to return to New York themselves.

As the three men stood on the back platform of the *Myra* watching the lights of Palm Beach grow dim behind them, Carruthers turned to Power and said abruptly:

"I've thought of a good name for that new steel company you were talking about."

"I thought you'd dropped that matter," said Dave in surprise. "What's the name?"

"The Invader Steel Corporation," answered Carruthers, looking quizzically at Shapiro.

"Why 'Invader'?" asked the lawyer. "Where do you get it from?"

"Oh, I'm naming the new company after Power," answered Carruthers pleasantly, "and unless I'm mistaken, he's due to invade the sacred sanctuary of a lot of pocketbooks and bank accounts before he gets through."

Dave smiled. "Invader sounds good, anyway," he said as he reached for a fresh cigar.

# XXII

## DAVID A WALL STREET MAN

DOWN near Central Park, Milton Shapiro maintained elaborate bachelor quarters manned by a retinue of servants large enough to care for a big family. And upon his insistent invitation, David Power moved his baggage into one of the many spare rooms, becoming a sort of permanent guest.

In the due course of time, over highballs and amid the smoke of many heavy Havanas, a directors' meeting was held and formally, or informally, David Power was elected to the Presidency of the Carboville Steel Company. And his calmness at the event verged dangerously near boredom.

But a telegram from Florida that arrived that night set him aglow with excitement. For Rosalie was coming home. Forty-eight hours would see her in New York City.

Of course, he met her. And Aunt Helen's welcome was almost as warm as that of his fiancée. Gail Rogers himself was missing—had not only failed to return to Palm Beach but had given the women of his family no inkling as to the possible date when he might be expected to leave the Coast. Mrs. Ainsworth commented somewhat tartly upon the perfunctory character of his communications, but since neither Dave nor Rosalie seemed inclined to discuss it, she let the matter drop.

The days that followed Rosalie's homecoming wore a roseate hue. More and more Dave found that rare quality which telescoped hours spent in her company into minutes. Sometimes, he found himself almost fearing that the Carboville position might interfere with his days with the woman he loved.

But finally, deciding that he must go in person and inspect the mills, he set a date to leave, and Shapiro having no more arduous duty at hand suggested that he would be glad to accompany him.

In due order, David Power and Shapiro arrived at the Carboville mills and the new President was introduced to the various executives. For three days he loitered around the works, more like some privileged visitor than the head of the institution.

Bored by the inaction, Shapiro finally suggested that they return to New York, but Dave, chatting with the foremen, watching the labourers and familiarizing himself with the channels of production, refused point-blank to even consider leaving.

The idea he was searching for finally arrived through the medium of a red-shirted day foreman named Cassidy.

"Well, Cassidy," commented Dave lazily, "I can't seem to gather any wisdom watching you fellows; guess I'll have to turn owl and spend a few nights with the fellows who burn the midnight oil—or coke."

"Nawthin' doin'," Cassidy spat contemptuously, "you'll learn nothin' from the night crews. They're all dubs; a good man doesn't have to work nights.

What that end of the outfit know about steel makin' you can put in your right ear and still hear as well as ever. You'll be spendin' your time to no good purpose, I'm thinkin', Mr. Power."

Dave regarded the big foreman thoughtfully.

"Thanks, Cassidy," he smiled, "I'm glad you've told me that. Maybe it won't be necessary for me to study the night shift, after all."

"You'll be wastin' time if you do, soor," shouted Cassidy through the uproar as Dave moved away past the red-mouthed furnaces toward the general office.

Shapiro was smoking his everlasting cigarette and trying to pass the time away with the aid of a magazine. He looked up as Dave entered.

"Now, look here, young man," he drawled, "you've seen enough of this place for the first trip. We don't expect you to turn the world upside down in five minutes. Come on," he wheedled, "let's tie the *Myra* on that twelve-forty for New York. You can come back here again as soon as you like. What do you say?"

Dave seated himself at the superintendent's desk.

"Which had you rather do—take me back to New York this noon or stay a couple of more days and see the output of the mills go up?"

"I'd rather see the output increased, of course, but that's out of the question, impossible."

"Think so?"

"Most certainly. Why, you don't even understand the business yet in its—"

Dave interrupted him abruptly.

"Admitted—but I wasn't hired on account of

my knowledge of this business. And what's more, I know just about as much right now about the technical end of it as I ever expect to learn. But if you will stick around here for a matter of forty-eight hours or so, I believe I'll show you something along the lines you and Carruthers employed me for."

He pressed the electric buzzer for a boy and dispatched him to find the superintendent.

"Sit down, Mr. Paxton," said Dave courteously as the latter entered. "I just want to verify a few things."

Silently the superintendent drew up a chair—like the rest of the mill organization he was curious to see what changes the new president intended to make.

"First of all," asked Dave, "the day crews are managing to make about six heats a day—is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the night crews about the same—six heats?"

Again the superintendent nodded an affirmative.

But Dave's next question was so leading that it brought Shapiro upright in his chair—all interest.

"Then," said Dave sharply, "explain to me, please: in view of the fact that each shift produces about the same amount of work, why do you consider the day crew your best men, why do they look down on the night men?"

Paxton cleared his throat a little, then smiled deprecatingly.

"I see you've been looking at the pay roll, Mr.

Power. Yes, our day men do average a little more money. But they represent our older and more experienced men. Sort of tradition of the business, you know, that the best men have their choice of shifts, and very naturally they choose day work."

"I see," said Dave thoughtfully. "One more thing: You told me that other mills of our identical facilities and the same number of employés are averaging about eight heats per shift—twenty-five per cent more than we have been doing. Is that correct?"

"Yes, that's so; but you see—"

"That will be all right, Mr. Paxton," Dave smiled. "Never mind the explanations. What time does the day shift quit—same hour that the night crew comes on, isn't it—six o'clock?"

"Yes, sir." Paxton wondered what his new boss was driving at.

"Thank you!" Dave stood up and stretched to his full length as he issued an amazing order. "Mr. Paxton, at five-forty-five sharp I want a blackboard and a large piece of chalk placed in front of the Number Four furnace. That's the one near the entrance, isn't it?"

"It is, but—"

"Five-forty-five tonight—blackboard and a piece of chalk—in front of Furnace Four. That will be all, thank you," and Dave calmly turned his back in token of dismissal.

As the superintendent left, Shapiro looked up questioningly.

"The output starts going up at five-forty-five tonight," said Dave pleasantly.

"Seeing is believing," said the lawyer quietly.

Promptly at a quarter to six, Dave Power appeared in front of the Number Four furnace, accompanied by Milton Shapiro, whose curiosity was fully aroused. The blackboard and the piece of chalk were there and the source of their presence had flashed through the plant by the word-to-mouth telegraph.

Slowly and deliberately Dave took the chalk and outlined a great circle. Then—with care and great exactness he chalked it in until it stood out on the dark board clear and distinct.

As he completed it, the six o'clock whistle blew its long blast and Dave turned to the foreman, who stood near him. Every man within ear shot strained to hear his words.

"How many heats for the day?"

"Six, same as usual," answered the foreman.

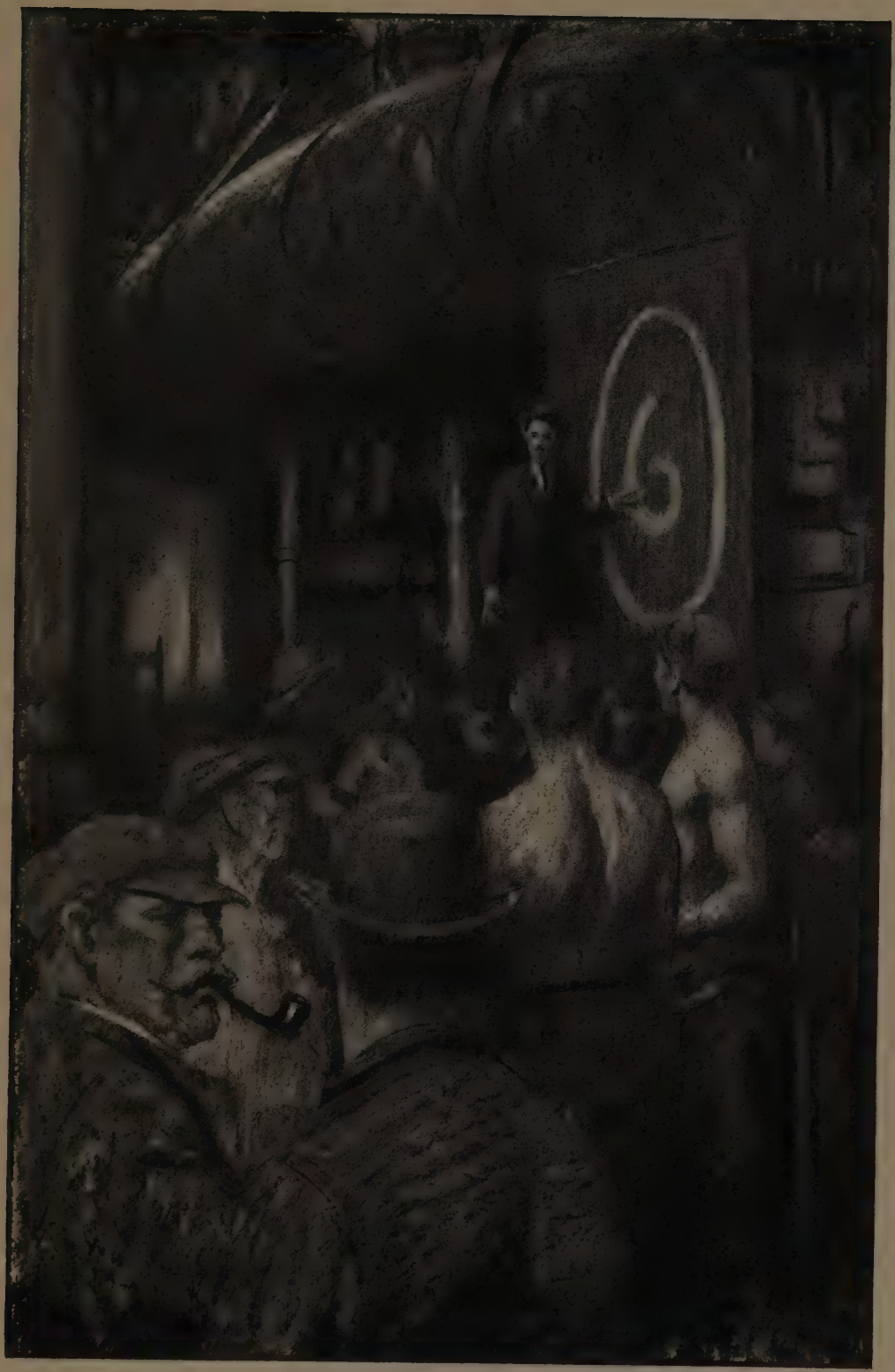
Dave leaned over and silently chalked in the centre of the circle a great figure 6 and laid the chalk down.

One of the night foremen was entering the room. He looked curiously at the figure and Dave explained, knowing that his words would be in the ears of every man in the plant inside of ten minutes.

"That's what the day shift has done—what the night crew does is another story. Come on, Shapiro."

And together they left the plant, walking briskly through the clear, cold outside air to the sidetrack where stood the private car *Myra*.

Shapiro broke the silence as they entered.



Dave silently chalked in the centre of the circle a great figure 6

"I don't understand it, Power—what are you driving at, anyway?"

"Wait till morning—then it will explain itself," answered Dave, and that was all the satisfaction the lawyer could get out of him.

And that night the men of the Carbovale Steel, facing that big 6 set by their enemies, the day crew, worked and sweated and toiled—and in the morning with a wide grin on his dark face, big Miachel, the foreman, erased the chalked 6 and replaced it with a bold 7 as token that the night crew had taken up the challenge.

And in the morning when Dave and the lawyer walked over to the plant and the latter read the big chalked 7 in the white ring, he understood and said to his companion in a low tone:

"Simple as sin and twice as deadly."

And Dave asked:

"Will you stay forty-eight hours longer on the strength of this?"

"Forty-eight *days,* if necessary," answered Shapiro with enthusiasm.

But his offer was unnecessary, for the day crew refused to permit the figure to stand, raised it to 8—and the night shift turned to and made the eight a nine. And inside of four days both crews were averaging ten heats a shift, an increase of sixty-six and two-thirds per cent, bringing the output of the Carbovale mills up with the best producers in the country.

And only when the output reached the ten-heat figure did the two men even think of a return to New York.

"Do you think it's safe to leave it now?" asked the lawyer anxiously.

"Why not?" questioned Dave.

"Well, production is up all right, but this competition scheme of yours is such a simple, transparent proposition that, frankly, I'm afraid it won't last."

"Shapiro," rejoined Dave solemnly, "the one place where you fall down is—your vision is clearer than that of the average man; consequently, when you put yourself in his place and try to think for him, you overreach. The night and day shift competition I've started will last until this mill falls to pieces. Just as long as the day crew feels it is better than the night crew and we put the burden of proof of superiority on a basis of what they accomplish."

"But this chalk idea—the white circle—what will you replace that with—certainly that is going to wear out?"

"Right. In sixty days it will be forgotten. But when the night foreman comes on he is going to ask what the day crew did—and when the day men enter they're going to ascertain the night shift's record. That chalk thing is simply the starting point of a habit—a good habit—one that will never wear itself out."

The lawyer thought a moment, then looked up.

"Power, you've a happy faculty of putting your finger on the right spot, and no mistake."

"Certainly I have," admitted the president of Carbovale Steel with supreme though unconscious egotism. Then he added: "Of course, this isn't the

end—we'll figure out something else to spur 'em up a little more."

"I have nothing to say," Shapiro admitted something. "You live up to your promises and then some. So go ahead, and luck to you."

On their return to New York, Carruthers paid them the distinct honour of calling for them in person and taking them to the company's down-town offices in his own car.

Once in the private office, the big man closed the door and turned to the two new arrivals.

"Reports show that production has gone way up down at the mill. Do you think it will last?" His tone was one of studied carelessness.

"Power says it will keep up, and I believe that he can do anything he promises." The lawyer's words were earnest.

Silence for a moment, then Carruthers spoke again.

"I'm inclined to agree with you. The only thing I can't understand is why somebody in this bunch didn't think of mixing a little competition into this matter of steel-making before."

"That's what I wrote you," said Shapiro easily. "Don't plagiarize. But the fact is that he did and we didn't and the mill is doubling its output."

"Right," answered Carruthers as he reached for the telephone and called the switchboard. "Is Mr. Keene there?"

Evidently he was, for the girl was ordered to send him in at once.

The man who entered was short and chubby, carelessly dressed and smoking a home-made cigarette.

Dave idly speculated as to his position while he acknowledged the curt introduction.

"Now, Keene," said Carruthers shortly, "you've got the details as to how our new president boosted production down at the mill. I gave you Shapiro's letter; it had full outlines. We want the name 'David Power' in print with pictures and all the rest of the trimmings—the 'young steel king'—that's the line. We want the public to know how he has cut the cost of producing our steel by applying good, old-fashioned horse sense—how his level head found the way where the biggest cost experts in the country had failed—tell them—"

Keene interrupted the speaker—almost rudely.

"I know what to tell 'em—publicity is my business." Turning abruptly to Dave, "Gotta photo of yourself, Mr. Power?"

"No, I haven't," answered Dave. He was a little puzzled.

"We'll get one right away," and Keene picked up the 'phone. "Tell Howe, the photographer, to come up here—quick—to take a portrait. Get him here inside of ten minutes."

He hung up the receiver.

"This is good stuff. It's got news value. I'll get it across easy. The best way to fool the newspapers out of free space is to be absolutely frank. Tell the truth and nothing but the truth—but on occasions not quite all of it." He appraised Dave shrewdly. "Mr. Power is fine copy—young man, big job, great success, proves that youth is no handicap to progress in modern business. Self-made too—no pull—no influence—just ability—they'll eat it up."

Carruthers interrupted his train of thought.

"Now, Keene, there's one very important thing I want to impress on you. Power must be played up as a man with the good of the common people at heart, not a fool philanthropist, but a practical business man who coming from the working class himself, knows their problems, sympathizes and is always looking for an opportunity to make big, practical moves to help them. Do you understand?"

"Yes—anything more?"

"Emphasize the fact that Mr. Power is operating this business by delegating absolutely all of the detail to other executives. His time is spent in studying the men who make the steel, in finding methods of aiding our workmen to make more money and better their condition, with a selfish object, certainly, but along constructive instead of destructive lines."

By this time Keene was scribbling on a note pad and as the photographer entered, Carruthers took his leave. Amusedly Shapiro watched the press agent and the chap with the camera pose Dave and photograph him, standing up, sitting down, at his desk, in front of the bookcase, profiles, busts, full lengths, every conceivable position and pose.

When the two had left the room, Dave turned to Shapiro.

"What's the idea?" he said simply.

Shapiro smiled.

"That tramp Keene is the best publicity man in the United States. Every newspaper editor from here to 'Frisco knows and likes him and he has a

news sense that enables him to get stories across that would be impossible from any other source."

"Well, what of it? Why press agent me—and I take it for granted that is what Carruthers is doing."

"Exactly," answered the lawyer. "He is going to make you famous."

"Oh, come across," said Dave impatiently, "I don't care whether I'm famous or infamous, but I do want to know the why of the thing."

"All right, I'll tell you." All traces of levity left the speaker's face. "Carruthers is grooming you, getting you ready to sponsor Invader Steel."

"What?" Dave was startled. "I thought that idea was dead, buried and forgotten."

"Carruthers never forgets anything there is money in. And I'll tell you frankly, Power, that he has in the back of his head the thought that possibly Invader Steel can be made more than a mere competition proposition. An unknown man couldn't sponsor the project, so he has started to make you known, to give you publicity of a kind that will lend itself to the new venture when it is ready to spring."

"If he really intends to go ahead," asked Dave, "wouldn't it be better to act quickly if you're going to offset the Emmerson trouble?"

"These things take time, Dave," replied Shapiro. "Emmerson has his money raised but it will take him another year or more to get his mills going. When we start Invader, you can have some of our old mills at a bargain and get under way quickly."

"But," said Dave perplexedly, "I haven't made good yet; I've only started."

"That may be so—I hope it is. If after a year of work you had succeeded in showing the same results, we would have been satisfied. Just because you did it in days instead of months is no reason why we should discount your arrival. You have succeeded —that's enough for Carruthers."

"Hm, I see," Dave was thoughtful.

"Didn't Carruthers have the feeling that this publicity properly directed might have a favorable effect on Carbovale stock?"

Shapiro looked at him, then threw back his head and roared.

"Dave Power, you've more than your share of brains. Instead of drinking in the praise, you analysed and hit the nail right on the head. I really shouldn't tell you but I will. Yes. The propaganda has a double motive—it was built to boost the stock as well as yourself. But what's the difference?"

"No difference," answered Dave, smiling back, "only I'd been racking my brain to figure a valid reason why Carruthers should start out to make me famous on such short notice. Of course, since he can instil public confidence and force the figures up on a stock that has been a little low, that puts a different complexion on the matter."

"But I don't want you to think for a moment that he hasn't got Invader in mind too," said the lawyer seriously.

The newspapers were beginning to print the Power propaganda when Dave dropped up to the Rogers mansion for dinner a few days later. Rosalie met

him as near the door as convention would permit. She was visibly excited.

"Oh, Dave, I'm so glad to see you—we've been reading all about you in the papers and it's fine that you're getting yourself so favorably talked of."

Jokingly Dave put his hand over her mouth but she removed it, understanding clearly why he did so.

"And that isn't all that's on my mind—what do you think? Father is coming home at last—he wired us from Chicago and we expect him this afternoon. Aunt Helen and I are going down to the station to meet him right after dinner." She hesitated. "Will you come with us?"

"Certainly," answered Dave, but without enthusiasm. The return of his prospective father-in-law was something he had puzzled over many times in the past few weeks—just how would the news of the engagement strike her parent? It made no real difference to Dave; he was as sure of the ultimate outcome as he was of sunrise, but on Rosalie's account he wanted matters to be as smooth and devoid of friction as possible.

But the solution of his problem came from Mrs. Ainsworth as the trio were riding to the station.

"I've been doing some thinking about you children," she said, "and knowing Rosalie's father as I do, I believe you had better say nothing about the engagement. A stranger for a son-in-law, if you'll excuse my frankness, might not be exactly what he would like. Let's wait until he has been back a while and grown accustomed to having Dave around before he's told about it."

Dave nearly heaved a sigh of relief but caught himself in time.

As Gail Rogers alighted from the Western train, it seemed to the two women that years had fallen from his back. His clothes had taken on a sprightly air, his step was springy and little extra touches of grooming gave him an air of youth that had not been evident when they saw him last.

With a keen, appraising glance, he acknowledged his reintroduction to David Power and as the two young people strolled ahead on their way through the station to the waiting car, he turned to Mrs. Ainsworth.

"Who is he?"

"I've mentioned him several times in my letters to you; David Power, the new president of Carbovale Steel. Do you mean to tell me that you haven't seen the big articles in the newspapers lauding his ability up to the sky?" Aunt Helen's speech was glib and suave for she had prepared it beforehand in anticipation of this very question.

"Er—yes, I saw something of it, I guess," replied Rogers carelessly. His mind was really on another matter. He coughed. "Helen—I am—" the last words came with a rush, "I'm going to be married again."

"You what?" and Mrs. Ainsworth stopped stock still, petrified with amazement.

"I have decided to take another wife," Rogers had recovered his poise. "A very beautiful and charming California girl has honoured me by consenting to become my bride."

"Who is she—do I know her?"

"I hardly believe so—she is a young widow—her name is Mrs. Norse."

"When—what—" Mrs. Ainsworth had hardly recovered her breath but Rogers understood her unasked questions.

"She is coming on here next week and the wedding will be very soon—I hope."

Rosalie and Dave had paused at the great, arched doorway to wait for the other couple. Heedless of Dave's presence, Mrs. Ainsworth looked pityingly at the girl and spoke.

"Rosalie, your father has just informed me that he is going to be married to a California widow named Norris or something like that, and she is coming here next week. That's why he has been West so long—that's why he comes back dressed like a twenty-year-old boy."

Rosalie looked at her father—and out of the great secret happiness in her own heart sprung a kindred feeling for him—and her two arms went around his neck and her soft lips sought his cheek in silent endorsement of love and approval.

And they all went home together.

# XXIII

## AN UNEXPECTED MOTHER-IN-LAW

A WEEK had passed since Gail Rogers's return to New York with the news of his forthcoming marriage. It had been a busy seven days for his prospective son-in-law.

The tangible results of Keene's rapidly growing publicity propaganda were beginning to show in the form of stacks of mail and many interviewers seeking words of wisdom for the readers of their publications from the lips of the man who had found the way to make a big success in the early years.

Dave went calmly about his business, turning the mail over to a secretary and handling interviewers with an unassuming frankness that won him many columns of complimentary space, and between his study of the business and his courtship he found his days full.

Ideas proverbially are no respecters of time or place. This is proven by the fact that the hour was seven in the morning and a cold spray was showering over Dave's muscled body when a peculiarly attractive thought struck him so forcibly that he shut off the water, hurried into his clothes and put in a long distance call for the mill superintendent.

Shapiro, attired in a bright blue dressing gown and bath slippers, lounged into the living-room just as the connection was made.

"Hello, Paxton? This is Power."

"Yes, sir. Good-morning!" The new note of respect in the superintendent's voice may have been traced to some of his newspaper reading; then again it may not have been due to that cause at all.

"You're working about two thousand men in the mill now, including both shifts?"

"Two thousand two hundred and five last pay day."

"All right, make me up two lists, one of the day crew, another of the night force. On each list indicate opposite the employé's name whether he is a good workman, fair or poor; also his wage and the length of time he has been in our employ. Do you understand what I want?"

And as the superintendent repeated his instructions, Dave spoke again.

"Can I have that list by tomorrow night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good-bye!" And he hung up the receiver.

"Well, how are you this morning?" he asked, turning to his host.

"Ragged, decidedly ragged—feel just the way I look," the lawyer rejoined, then added as an afterthought: "By the way, I've a choice bit of scandal for you."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, you've been going around quite a bit with that Rogers girl." Dave's face darkened and Shapiro hurried to correct the mistaken impression. "It isn't about her. This just happens to be in the family—it's her father. You see, we were out on a party last night and along around eleven we went over to the Grand Central to put one of the fellows

aboard a train. Who should be there, meeting a Western train, but the old gentleman. And who in the world do you suppose that gay old bird was meeting?"

"I haven't the least idea." Dave's tone was cold and forbidding, but the lawyer proceeded with his story.

"He met just about the smoothest looking girl I've seen in years—and not knowing he had an audience, he proceeded to take for himself one ardent embrace and two large kisses. What do you think of that sly dog?"

"I think," Dave spoke slowly and carefully, "that in all probability the lady he met was his fiancée! She is about due here now. It isn't generally known, but under the circumstances I guess it's all right to tell you—Mr. Rogers is to be married soon."

"I see," the lawyer whistled softly. "Well, luck to him! If the one he met is the one he's going to marry, he certainly picked a good looker. By the way, Carruthers was with us last night, and he has been studying the mill reports."

"Yes?"

"He thinks that with these last increases the mills have about hit the limit. You know that last week broke all records and our stock is already beginning to show life, don't you?"

"Yes, I know both facts," said Dave casually. "But in regard to our production: Personally, I think it has just begun to climb. I've another idea for an increase; in fact, I was just telephoning for some figures in regard to it when you came in."

"So that's what you were talking to the mill about?"

Dave nodded an affirmative. "At any rate, I'm going to work a little on it," he said.

The morning was bright and sparkling. Dave sauntered through Central Park, out onto Fifth Avenue, his mind half made up to walk to the office.

He had reached the middle of the block near Thirty-fourth Street when with a creak of rusty brakes, a taxicab drew up at the curb and a woman's face peered out of the window.

He did not even trouble to turn his head as he drew abreast of the cab, although its occupant was still looking directly at him. He glanced covertly around to see if some other pedestrian was within eye shot of the cab—the woman was positively rude—and then, a voice with a too familiar ring stopped him dead in his tracks.

"Good-morning, David Power," said the voice sweetly.

And Dave, half afraid for the first time in his life, turned and saw smiling out of the open cab window—Hebe Norse.

A score of thoughts flashed through his mind. In Palm Beach he had had half a mind to send a detective West to find out where she was and what she was doing. Why hadn't he followed that impulse? Well, he hadn't and here she was; he'd face the music. He walked over to the cab, a half smile masking his true feelings.

"How do you do?" he asked casually as if he had left her but an hour before.

She opened the cab door invitingly.

"You seem to be going my way. Ride with me. I've a million or more things to say to you and a lucky chance has saved me the trouble of calling at your office."

Dave stepped inside and seated himself, then calmly looked her over. Unquestionably Hebe had improved. The rough spots were gone and in their place were little touches of good grooming. In the simplicity of her outfit lay an air of effectiveness and extreme expense. And from the fresh perspective that months of separation gave, Dave noted with surprise the very real beauty of her, the unusual attractiveness.

"Do I look natural to you, Dave?" she asked amusedly.

He laughed. "You sure do."

"How is the 'boy steel king'?" she asked abruptly. "You see, I read the newspapers—only honestly Dave, knowing you as I do, some of the things they said made me laugh."

He sat in silence as she continued:

"As I said before, it is really fortunate that I met you. I have something very important to tell you. You see, I am about to become your mother-in-law—or should I say stepmother-in-law? Don't get excited—but then you never do. Perhaps I shouldn't have said that with such assurance, for you haven't married the girl yet, have you? At any rate, I am about to become Mrs. Gail Rogers. That is why I am in New York, answering that unasked question of yours."

Though outwardly Dave showed no sign, inwardly

he seethed and boiled. The situation was flatly impossible.

She was speaking again:

"Dave, you and I will have to have an understanding. For our mutual good, it had better be right now. First of all, you want to know how it all happened. Crane was trying to interest Mr. Rogers in one of his oil properties. In the course of his negotiations I was introduced. Gail of course knew nothing of the relations that existed. This was not long after you left. I am not blind. I saw the impression I made and immediately began to lay my plans to exchange a very insecure position for an extremely comfortable and certain one—especially since Gerald was being hammered hard on that title you turned over."

"You knew about that?" Dave's question was almost involuntary.

"Crane knew—and that was the same thing. Incidentally, he will never forgive you, but then he'll never forgive me either, for that matter, I suppose. At any rate, Dave, here we both are. War between us would be disastrous for both. And since we both seem to be getting exactly what we want, there is no excuse for differences. You can help me by keeping quiet, and I believe I can aid you by doing a little talking."

"Just what do you mean?"

"This: Gail, of course, tells me everything. This Mrs. Ainsworth, his late wife's sister, I believe, has been in correspondence with him, and her well meaning puffs of your dear self as an eligible have resulted in Mr. Rogers considering you in the light

of a suitor for his daughter's hand. And not with any great favour, I might add."

"Go on."

"I, of course, put two and two together and drew my own conclusions. Now, my dear Dave, talking very plainly, I don't know whether you love the girl or are after her money, and frankly I don't care which it is. But I do know that I can wind this old man around my finger and where ordinarily you'd have a hard time to get his consent, I'll get it for you without any trouble. How's that—all in return for a little silence. And I know you wouldn't open your mouth anyway."

A sudden sense of revulsion swept David Power. The very idea sickened him. Hebe calmly discussing Rosalie and offering to aid him—why, sooner than accept help from such a source, he'd— Then calm returned—his "common sense" took hold and he accepted the situation as it stood.

"Hebe, you certainly understand that I would never knowingly do anything that would injure you," he spoke with considerable feeling. "At least, we were good pals. You have nothing to fear from me."

"I knew that, Dave. At least, I felt it. You're a real fellow!" There was a trace of emotion in the girl's voice. "And I was just joking about making a bargain with you. I'm going to do what I can for the sake of old times." And then she added softly: "May I?"

Dave made no answer, but she took silence for assent as he changed the subject.

"Hebe, aren't you afraid someone will talk—

say something that will arouse his suspicions as to you—your past?" he asked.

"I don't believe in ghosts—nobody talked out West, where it all happened, so why should it come up here, where folks don't know me and haven't one-ninetieth the food for conversation they had out there? No, I'm not afraid. Once married, my future is assured, whether it lies in marriage or divorce. Dave, I want to tell you something: Gossip, serious gossip, I mean, almost never comes to the ears of the one it most concerns. Why didn't Gerald Crane say something to Rogers? I'll tell you why. Knowing that Gail was interested in me, he didn't dare! And that holds true all around." Her voice lost its momentary seriousness. "Now, I know you're anxious to get to your office and here we've been driving around without even telling the man where to go."

"That's all right," said Dave dully, "drop me off here—I prefer to walk."

The cab stopped and the door opened.

"Dave," said Hebe, "just one little thing: one of these days, pretty soon, you're going to be invited to dinner—to meet me. And remember, please, you never saw me before in your life—you are meeting me for the first time."

"Do you think that is the wise course?" asked Dave, who by this time was standing at the curb.

"I do," she answered and half leaned forward. Dave somehow or other caught the idea she was offering him a kiss and countered the move by lifting his hat and hurrying away.

## XXIV

### YANKEE EFFICIENCY

LIKE a man in a trance, he wandered to his office. All the things he had left behind him flashed up before his mind's eye. He shuddered at the vista of horrors in his past.

At four o'clock that very afternoon, he received a telephone call and Gail Rogers himself extended a more than usually cordial invitation to dinner. As he replaced the receiver on its hook, Dave studied a moment. Was it chance or had Hebe already been at work? It made no difference.

The dinner at the Rogers home was formal. Dave went bravely through the mockery of an introduction to Hebe Norse. During the progress of the evening, she surprised him by her clever handling of the situation. To himself he admitted that she had progressed in finesse since he had last seen her. He stifled resentment as he saw her evident play for Rosalie's favour and told himself that he dare not interfere.

As he was bidding Rosalie farewell, she confided to him that much of the dread of having a stepmother had been taken away by the charm of the bride-to-be and he steeled himself against repulsion. It was a peculiar thing, but the splendid control he had always exercised over himself almost without effort had at last revealed a vulnerable point—where

Rosalie was concerned, he found himself forced continually to exercise a rigid discipline over his emotions.

In the days that followed, Dave contrived to meet Rosalie as often as he had before her father's return. Rogers while not exactly enthusiastic over the situation, at least was not openly antagonistic.

In the meantime, Dave's new idea for the steel mills was being rapidly formulated into a definite plan for presentation to his associates. From tests and investigations, he felt sure that he had struck one of the biggest moves ever made by any one concern in the industry.

He did not call a formal meeting to discuss the matter but waited until chance brought the other two men into his office at the same time, then casually broached the idea.

"Mr. Carruthers," he said indifferently, "our friend tells me that you've made up your mind that the mills have struck their top pace."

"More than that, Power," the other answered. "If you can maintain the present rate, you'll be exceeding my expectations. Frankly, speaking for myself, I shan't be disappointed if it drops off ten per cent or so. You've got these labourers working at a speed that flesh and blood simply can't keep up."

"Is that so?" answered Dave quietly. "Some kinds of 'flesh and blood' cannot only keep it up but *push* it up. Instead of that ten per cent drop you're looking for, I can give you an increase. Do you want it?"

"Certainly! What's your idea?"

"Very simple," said Dave. "And to establish a basis for what I'm going to suggest, I would like to ask you two questions."

"Go ahead," said Carruthers.

"Question number one: The men working in our plants today vary in ability. In other words, we have a small percentage of excellent workmen—a few good ones, and a lot of mediocre men. Do you concede that?"

"Yes. That same condition exists in every plant in the country."

Dave opened the drawer of his desk and produced a sheaf of bound sheets and a small card. Holding the latter in his hand, he resumed. "Before I ask the second question, I want to give you the exact facts regarding the ability averages of the men at present in our employ. These large sheets, compiled by Paxton, show the individual ability, rating and daily wage of every individual in our employ. The small card I have in my hand is a recapitulation of this information. It shows that our low wage is two dollars a day and our high pay five. And I might add that we get thrice as much work per dollar from our five-dollar-a-day men as we do from those who are receiving two. Do you get that? Our best men, at higher wages, cost less than poorer men at lower salaries!"

He paused to let his words sink in, then proceeded.

"According to my estimates, about one-tenth of the men are good—what I would call ideal workmen from a standpoint of ability—the balance are fair and mediocre and poor.

"Now, here is my second question," he spoke

slowly and carefully. "On the basis of the fact—for it is a fact—that an excellent workman at five dollars a day returns more work per dollar than a cheaper and less able man—what would happen to our production if our mill force were composed one hundred per cent of excellent workmen, if we replaced the laggards and incompetents with able, exceptionally skilled men?"

Carruthers weighed the question carefully.

"If—mind you 'if'—you could do what you say—we'd beat every production record made since the beginning of the world. But—it's easy to theorize—how do you propose to get these men?"

"Here comes the idea," and Dave smiled. "In the first place, establish a minimum wage of five dollars per day in our mills—pay every man that figure. In itself that will attract good men to our employ. Then set a bonus of twenty-five cents to every employé for every heat per shift we run over our present number."

"That's the most insane idea I ever heard of—you're putting a premium on incompetency and handicapping skilled labour by such a plan—"

Dave interrupted him.

"Just a moment. If the establishment of a minimum wage of five dollars per day would permanentize our present production, would it be economy?"

"Yes, certainly."

"All right! Now, if for twenty-five cents per man you can buy an extra 'heat' per day, is that a fair price to pay for the additional production?"

"It would be dirt cheap, but how—"

"I'm coming to that. I propose that each group

of our men elect one member to what we will term our 'shop committee.' To keep up the competition, there will be one of these committees for the night shift and another for the day crew. In the hands of these two committees, made up of and by our men, will rest the hiring and firing of every man in the mills!"

"That's on the ragged edge of Socialism."

"Nothing of the kind—it's the soundest kind of good business and I can prove it."

Shapiro, who had been weighing every word carefully, now spoke.

"You don't have to prove it—the thing is self-evident. Carruthers, can't you see the scheme? The minimum wage will attract the best workmen in the business to our plants without advertising for them or attempting to hire them. The bonus plan will make the men work to make more than their salaries. Now, if we tried to fire the mediocre men and hire good ones in their place, we'd have a strike in the plant and hail Columbia from the mills whose men we tried to take away. But Dave's shop committees, the workmen themselves, will weed out their own incompetents and, for the sake of the bonuses, replace them with the best men they can lay their hands on. Say, this thing looks one hundred per cent and I'm for it. Can't you see the possibilities, Carruthers?"

"Wait a moment!" The big man arose and, walking to the window, contemplated the skyline for a moment. Dave swept the papers off the desk and smiling at Shapiro lighted a cigar.

Carruthers turned. "I'm inclined to believe

there's something in it. The minimum wage will attract good men; the shop committees will want them, so they can earn the bonuses, and the thing will automatically work itself up through the action of the men themselves."

"Exactly," said Dave briefly.

"I want to think it over a little—and I don't know but what we'd better have a directors' meeting to pass on a thing of this kind."

"In that case," said Dave soberly, "I have something here that might interest your directors," and he openly smiled. "It's the record of what happened in Foreman Cassidy's gang when I put this plan into operation with them and gave them permission to do their own hiring and firing."

"What's that?" Carruthers, startled, reached for the paper and Shapiro's mouth twitched humourously; he had anticipated that Dave had some sort of proof to back his suggestion.

"Oh, yes," and Dave handed over the sheet, "I took the liberty of trying it out in a limited way without waiting for your directors. You see, until anything is proven, it is only a theory, and knowing how hard-headed you two fellows are, I wanted to give you facts, not fancies."

"And I guess you've done that very thing, judging from what this record shows," said Carruthers, looking up. "Get Keene in here quickly—this concern is about to make the greatest philanthropic business move of the century. No man in its employ will receive less than five dollars daily wage, plus bonuses, and they are to be their own employers. Great! Get it started."

Shapiro walked to the door and called for Keene, then the three men settled down to discuss operating details of the plan that promised such unusual profits.

Again the press was called upon. The idea was so startling and revolutionary that the first pages of the leading dailies carried entire columns on this, the latest move of David Power, the man who thought of his workmen and their well being first and depended upon their reciprocation for his returns.

Rosalie's comments typified the state of mind of the public regarding the new plan.

"You, Dave!" she said admiringly. "That big heart of yours is certainly beating for something besides money. No matter what other people do, you're going to pay your men enough to live on. And putting them on honour and letting them govern themselves—you're not going to be disappointed—they'll pay you back with interest. This is the kind of thing I knew was in you—only—" she hesitated, "couldn't it have been done a little more quietly? I like to see you praised, but all this newspaper notoriety, you know—it's—"

Dave, understanding her feeling, explained that while he personally desired no publicity, the newspaper work was beyond his control, as the owners of the company simply refused to suppress these things.

And Rosalie, knowing what she did of Carruthers and Shapiro, thought she understood and was content.

On the other hand, Hebe alone with Dave for a

moment, shrewdly put her small finger on the right spot.

"All hail the great philanthropist!" she said good humouredly. "Acclaimed by newspapers everywhere as the modest man who does the workman good—or perhaps that's a bad way of putting it! With the public buying Carbovale stock and its quotations going higher every time the ticker runs off a yard of ribbon, why not be benevolent? And entirely apart from that, Dave, what have your gang got up their sleeves—you're getting ready for something, I know. What is it?"

"To the suspicious all things are shady," quoted Dave solemnly, but to himself registering a mark of respect for the woman's insight.

As the weather began to turn warmer, Carruthers put his yacht into commission and made his headquarters there, coming in to the city, lying idle in the harbour or cruising as the mood struck him. One morning a conference was held on the boat that brought matters to a head, so far as Invader Steel was concerned.

"Power, we're getting ready for Invader Steel," he announced.

"So?" asked Dave interestedly. He had not heretofore put much credence in the seriousness of Carruthers's intentions in this direction.

"Yes," answered the other man, "Shapiro's been working and getting things all ready on the legal end and it's about time for you to get busy."

The lawyer interrupted him. "Better let me explain it. Now, Dave, we have secretly purchased the Union Brokerage Company, which is a stock

selling organization having a large and competent sales force. That's move number one. And I have the incorporation papers all ready for Invader."

"How much are you going to incorporate for?" asked Dave.

"Ten million dollars," answered Shapiro in much the same manner as he would have mentioned ten cents.

Dave looked at him, amazed at the amount. The lawyer resumed:

"Don't worry about that. The amount of the stock doesn't mean anything. After the brokerage company gets it distributed, we'll put it on the curb and it could be fifty million as well as ten." He leaned forward earnestly. "It is important that you understand the backbone of the plan. Owing to the amount of publicity you have had as the 'friend of the workingman,' Carruthers and I have evolved a new idea. You and a couple of other fellows will incorporate Invader Steel as a new company, free from the traditions and precedents which hamper you in your present connection." Shapiro grinned meaningly, "and with it you propose to give the workman a fair share of the wealth produced—to carry to a successful conclusion the same work which has done so much for Carbovale."

"I don't get you," said Dave. "What has all this to do with stock selling and steel making?"

"It's a new talking point," explained the lawyer, "and with a purpose of that kind behind the company, we will open a new field of capital—the philanthropists will put their money in with much ado in the newspapers about their kindness to humanity

and much secret certainty of heavy profits. Incidentally, you understand, of course, that the ten-million-dollar corporation is simply an entering wedge —a starting point. After that is cleaned up, we'll divide, let her rest for six months and then recapitalize. But the first thing is to incorporate."

"Yes," answered Dave quietly.

"Now, once that is done," the lawyer continued, "you have a lot of stock certificates and no money. Is it necessary to turn that stock into cash? Of course, you can't do it yourself, so you must make some connection that will market these securities and furnish you the capital to operate on. Now, the question is, who is going to sell it?"

"The Union Brokerage Company," suggested Dave with a grin.

"Correct," assented the attorney. "Our own concern, bought through agents, so that no one can trace our connection. Now, you are going to operate Invader Steel largely for the love of humanity— but the Union Brokerage Company is a cold-blooded business institution, consequently it will charge you for selling that stock."

"Of course, but how much?"

"Fifty per cent: one dollar out of every two subscribed."

"Good Lord, that's rank robbery!" exclaimed Dave.

"Not robbery, just business," interjected Carruthers gently.

Shapiro continued as if he had not been interrupted. "The matter of Invader Steel turning over its ten-million-dollar capital stock for five million

dollars in notes of the Brokerage Company, the terms of payment and so forth are legal details which are being attended to and it is unnecessary to burden you with."

"Wait a moment," interrupted Dave. "You talk in millions so glibly that I have to stop and think to catch up with you. In the first place, aren't you capitalizing this thing too high?"

"Why so? This is a giant enterprise with big men at the head and a big mission. Under the circumstances, people will readily buy stock in a heavily capitalized concern, where they would regard a smaller outfit as a piker project. Folks like to own stock in a 'ten-million-dollars' company. There's something alluring about it even when the words are only on paper."

"All right," said Dave. "I'll pass that question. But fifty per cent for the sale of the stock is outrageous. Who will buy anything when he knows that fifty cents out of every dollar he pays in is going to the fellow that sells it to him?"

"You forget something," said Shapiro smoothly. "You overlook the fact that Carruthers knows and you know and I know but that outside of the interested parties, that fifty per cent is a deep, dark secret. The impression of the average investor will be that his entire payment goes to the corporation—and we have no control over impressions, have we?"

"But—"

"My dear Dave, you are 'butting' a thing that Carruthers and myself have been doing all our lives—that end of the business we know from A to Z and back again. Take our words for it, won't you?"

"I suppose I'll have to," assented Dave.

Carruthers shifted his chair and drawled, "Just get it clear in your head and govern yourself accordingly. You are the man in whose brain was born this wonderful idea of wealth sharing with the workman—the stock selling you know nothing about—that is simply a necessary step to the prosecution of the project. And incidentally, we have decided that it will probably be wise to secure another sponsor to act with you so that it won't all rest on your shoulders. He'll have to be in on the division of the cash, though."

"If it goes through the way you've planned, there'll be money enough to go around, I'm thinking," said Dave quietly. "Whom did you have in mind for the fourth man?"

Shapiro spoke up. "I have suggested Gail Rogers. He's a wealthy man—been in the public eye for years in connection with things of this kind—good reputation—and so much money that no one would accuse him of selfish motives. And once in, he could get fifty noted philanthropists, hungry for publicity and honour, working for nothing but glory, to put their names up where it would help us sell the stock. He's the right man, all right."

"Shapiro," Dave spoke quickly, "if you'll pardon my injecting personal affairs into this matter, I would much prefer that you did not use Mr. Rogers—that you selected someone else."

"Why?"

"Well, there's a good chance of his finding out about our fifty per cent rake-off and—well, I am in

a position where I don't care to do anything that might injure his opinion of me."

Shapiro looked him directly in the eyes—his glance was full of understanding. "I know, Dave, just exactly what you mean. But didn't you hear Carruthers say a while ago that the fourth man was to be in on the profits? We both know Rogers—and our plan is to take him in as the fourth partner. Is that clear enough?"

It took Dave a second or two to find his voice. "But he is enormously wealthy—he wouldn't stoop to a thing like this—"

"Bosh, rot and nonsense! Carruthers and myself are not poverty stricken, but we're 'stooping,' as you put it. Dave, the more money a man has, the more he wants, and Gail Rogers is twice as gold greedy as all three of us put together. Do you realize—do you fully realize just how much money is involved in this?" The lawyer paused. "Pretty near a million apiece! You think he won't come in? I'll tell you that he'd go right down on his knees and beg for the chance."

"One more thing," said Dave slowly. "I suppose it is a little early to ask this question, but—after we get ours from the stock sales—and after Emmerson is cleaned up—what becomes of Invader Steel?"

"Strictly between ourselves," said Carruthers, winking, "after the cream is skimmed and our dear ex-partner decides to seek some other field—I don't care what becomes of Invader, do you?"

"Dave changed the subject. "I suppose I'll resign from Carbovale when I start Invader."

"Why should you?"

"Won't the public realize that you fellows are in it—I thought that was the thing you wanted to avoid. And if I'm still in your employ—"

"The public, my boy," said Carruthers seriously, "will think what we tell them to think. The information that will be given out will put Invader up as your own proposition, Shapiro and myself disapproving but admitting its possibilities and hanging on to your valuable services up to the last possible moment, for which no one could blame us. Eh, Shapiro?"

Dave made no further comment and the lawyer arose.

"Going back to town?" he asked Dave.

"Yes."

"All right, we'll go together."

Late that afternoon two things happened in rapid succession. First, Shapiro called up and said briefly:

"Saw Rogers and fixed it up. He's in with us."

And hardly had Dave replaced the receiver on the hook when the bell tinkled again. It was Rogers himself and in his voice was a new note of cordiality.

"Hello there, my boy, how are you this afternoon?"

"Well, thank you."

"I wonder if you would care to drop up and have dinner with us tonight—just the family and Mrs. Norse—informal."

"Why, yes, I shall be delighted."

# XXV

## A MARRIAGE IS PLANNED

THE atmosphere at dinner was pleasant. Dave's host was cordial and Mrs. Ainsworth beamed and smiled while Hebe gave him a surreptitious, meaning glance that he interpreted as a direct hint that so far as Rogers was concerned things were decidedly coming his way.

Adroitly Rogers suggested that they retire to the library for an after-dinner smoke.

The two men drew on choice Havanas. Dave, cool and contained, missed no move of his host's. Well, here he sat, alone with the father of the girl he loved. For the first time since their acquaintance the atmosphere of cordiality prevailed. Why wait?

"Mr. Rogers," he said abruptly, "I am going to be perfectly frank and rather blunt about a matter that possibly should be handled with a great deal of diplomacy."

"Yes?" said his host encouragingly.

Dave's next words came sharp and crisp, his clear eyes burned deep into those of his auditor and sincerity rang in his voice.

"I love Rosalie!" And then he added simply: "I should like your permission to marry her."

"Ah, what's that?" In spite of the other man's knowledge of the affair, Dave's statement was so entirely unexpected that for a moment the father

was disconcerted. "Does she know of this—what does she say?"

"I have her consent, sir."

Gail Rogers sank into the cushions of his easy chair. His teeth clinched deep into his cigar, then relaxed. After all, it was bound to come some day—the man Power was high in the councils of the steel crowd, Mrs. Ainsworth thought well of him, even Hebe had made favourable comment many times. And this Invader Steel thing that had been broached to him that afternoon, was a plum of a rare sort.

"Mr. Power," he said, "I am not going to make the usual speech to you. This is not entirely unexpected. I love my daughter dearly but she is old enough to know her own mind. You are a man of some position. I believe you are a comer. Frankly, as a son-in-law you appeal to me very strongly." The older man smiled. "And I guess from what Milton Shapiro told me this afternoon, we are already partners in a way. So—I say—she is yours, my boy, and God bless you both."

Dave slowly arose and walking over to the other man, gripped his hand in a clasp of iron.

"Thank you. This is one thing you'll never regret," he said simply.

"I don't think I shall ever have occasion to regret it," said Rogers warmly, returning his handclasp. "Now, be seated, please. There's something else I want to talk to you about."

What was coming now? Inquiry into his past? His future? But the other man was talking already in a low confidential tone.

"Ahem! In regard to this new steel corporation matter—ah—I agreed to further the project, as it seems to be a worthy one. As I understand the profits are to be divided by four people?"

"Yes, that's correct." Dave was astounded—in almost the same breath that he dealt out his daughter's hand, the man was seeking particulars of an almost dishonest business project. Dave bit his lip. Perhaps Shapiro's estimate was nearer right than he had thought. But when he spoke, his tones showed no trace of his thoughts. "The profits are to be divided equally between Carruthers, Shapiro, myself and you—since you kindly consented to come in."

"And just for the sake of getting a different view of it," the other man was rubbing the fingers of one hand against the palm of the other—Dave wondered if the motion had any significance, "what is your estimate of these possible profits? I have a great deal of confidence in your opinion—especially since Mr. Shapiro told me the inside of that minimum wage plan of yours."

"From what I can judge," Dave spoke slowly, "we should realize in the neighbourhood of a million dollars apiece—at least that's what we hope for."

"That's fine!" Rogers was openly rubbing his hands together. Dave could almost see the glittering gold reflected in his eyes. "That's a great crowd you're in with, my boy. Depend on me—I'll do my part. I'll make every big man in the East endorse it as the greatest plan of the age. Now, suppose you go and bring Rosalie here?"

Dave jumped to his feet and left the room, return-

ing with Rosalie on his arm. A whispered message had prepared her for what was to come.

"Rosalie," Rogers simulated extreme sternness, "this young man has just asked for your hand in marriage. And I—have consented."

"Father—Dave," and the two men found themselves held tight in the slim arms of a beautiful girl who was crying and laughing with happiness at one and the same time.

So, David Power, his dearest dream on the verge of becoming a reality, found himself somewhat glumly wishing that his business didn't have such a beastly unpleasant habit of popping its head into his private, personal affairs.

Dave left the Rogers' mansion at eleven o'clock and arrived home at twelve-ten. It took him exactly that length of time to decide that since everything was settled all around, there was no use wasting time, so his first act after restraining a wild impulse to go right back where he had come from, was to take the telephone receiver off the hook and in spite of the hour, call Rosalie.

"Hello, David," she called softly.

"Hello, Rosalie girl," he whispered back. "I've been thinking—"

"Thinking what?"

"There's no reason why we shouldn't get married any time now, is there, dear?"

She hesitated a moment but her "No" came clear and sweet.

"Are you keen about a church wedding—a big affair?"

This time her "No" came without hesitation, and she added timidly: "I don't care when or how it happens, just so long as it takes place—but perhaps I hadn't ought to say that, had I?"

"You just bet you had," and Dave smiled happily through the darkness. "Will you let me set the date, then?"

"Yes," she breathed.

His answer was a bombshell.

"Tomorrow morning at ten o'clock!"

"Oh, Dave, I can't get ready."

"Let's get married first and get ready afterwards."

Silence—and then a long sigh and something that he chose to interpret as "Yes."

"And, Rosalie, let's have it a runaway wedding. It won't be, but let's pretend. Just Aunt Helen with you and Shapiro as my best man—and we'll start honeymooning before anyone knows anything about it." Dave's last suggestion was born of the natural distaste and dread he had of the presence of Hebe at his wedding—and he gladly wished Rogers on the absent list as well.

When she finally consented, he found himself happier than he had ever been in his life and nothing was quite so foreign to his condition as bed and sleep. So after wandering around the apartments for half an hour, he strode into Shapiro's bedroom, turned the lights on full and shook the lawyer into wakefulness.

Rubbing his eyes, Shapiro sat up and peered into Dave's jubilant face. "What's up, man—burglars,

bombs or the police—I never saw you like this before?"

Dave leaned forward and grasped him tightly by both shoulders.

"I've got a job for you in the morning—you're to be best man at a wedding!"

The lawyer was wide awake now.

"Whose wedding?" he asked.

"Mine!"

"Good Lord! I knew you had it in your mind—but in the morning—and me best man—Dave, I've never been best anything."

"You've been the best friend I've ever had and that's why you're going to be my best man. Don't make me say it all over again—just take it for granted and congratulate me—it's the first time I ever felt like being congratulated by anybody on anything and you're elected. Come on, now!" And he stretched out his hand.

"Congratulate you," the lawyer groaned. "I pity you. However, well, here's hoping. Come on, climb off the bed and let's get a drink. I'll sit up all night and let you tell me what a lucky devil you are and how wonderful she is—I'm easy."

Neither of them got much sleep that night.

By seven-thirty in the morning, Dave had packed everything he owned—he was ready to move out bag and baggage. Only his violin case remained and as his eyes fell on it, he turned to the lawyer, and said in a half-joking, half-serious tone:

"Shapiro, this violin has given me many an hour of happiness. In its way it has been my passion. But from now on, I've only room for one love in

my life—music gives way to my wife," he pronounced the last two words like the name of the Deity. "So I'm going to give the friend I'm leaving to the friend I hope will always be with me."

And he placed the huge black case in Shapiro's hands.

As they stepped from the church, Dave turned to Rosalie in perplexity.

"I clear forgot all about our honeymoon! Where shall we go?"

Rosalie laughed a silvery, tinkling laugh of unadulterated happiness.

"Let's take a machine and run away from everybody for a week or so."

And Shapiro's voice chimed in.

"I haven't had a chance to buy a wedding present. You folks were in such a hurry. Let me buy the car you honeymoon in. It will be a privilege."

So without rice or old shoes, but with much love and real good wishes from those they left behind, the couple whirled out of the city toward the green, cool country behind the hood of an enormous grey roadster.

# XXVI

## DAVID ON A PEDESTAL

UP in the green hills, about sixty-five miles from Manhattan Island, is a quaint old hostelry, a trifle off the beaten path and with a smack of the old world flavour to its furnishings and service. It was here on the last lap of their bridal tour that the couple paused to spend a day before returning home.

Breakfast was over and the Sunday papers from the city had arrived with the coffee. Rosalie reached for one of the printed sheets and as she did so, Dave's hand gently closed over hers and he smiled.

"Dave," she said softly, "things do turn out right in real life as well as in fairy tales, don't they?"

"They have for us, dear," he replied.

The entry of a waiter interrupted the little passage and Rosalie retired in embarrassment behind an opened paper. Dave amusedly followed suit, and on the front page of the sheet he selected, a feature article caught his eye.

It was headed:

"STEEL MAKER OFFERS PERMANENT SOLUTION OF LABOUR PROBLEM."

He glanced at it carelessly, then something riveted his attention and he began to read carefully.

The article purported to be an interview with him in which he suggested and advocated the establishment of factories on a basis of paying the labour employed with a fair share of the wealth produced instead of a day or piece work wage. The writer went on to point out what had been already accomplished in Carbovale Steel by Dave's work in this direction and he was surprised to see how plausible and inviting the whole plan looked in print.

Foundations were already being laid for what was to come. His partners were losing no time. He wrinkled his brow a trifle and Rosalie who had been watching him, picked up the paper as he laid it down.

"What were you reading that made you look so solemn, Dave?" she asked, glancing over the page in search of it as she spoke.

"Nothing—much," he replied, watching her with admiring eyes.

She located the article, read it slowly and carefully, then laid down the paper and looked up.

"Dave! That's simply the most splendid thing I have ever heard of!" Her eyes sparkled. "Why haven't you told me before?"

"I really didn't think it amounted to anything—just an idea—a wild dream."

"Wild dream! It's the most natural, sensible thing in the world," and then she added rather abruptly, "Tell me about it—all about it—please."

"Why, you've just finished reading all there is to tell. I can't add anything—just now, at any rate."

"Tell me, anyway," she insisted, "I want to hear it from you—at first hand."

"Here goes, then. First of all, Rosalie, you don't know it but the labouring class hate their employers—they struggle for existence and the right to live and raise their families and all their hardships centre back to the slimness of their pay envelopes as the fundamental cause."

"Yes," she interrupted eagerly, "and then they see the people they slave for living in great homes and riding in motors and to themselves they think, 'These luxuries were bought with the work of our hands.'"

He looked at her in surprise. "Where did you learn all this?"

"I've done settlement work," she said quietly, "and my eyes have been open—I am not blind."

He sat back and thought a moment—her clear vision revealed a new side to him—however, he'd go ahead with the lie. Judging from the newspapers this morning, the news was coming out soon and he had better tell the story first to Rosalie in his own way.

"Rosalie," he said slowly, "I don't want you to misunderstand. This is not philanthropy or Socialism on my part. It's good common sense. I believe that the man who makes a fortune by starving his workers and swelling his profits is a fool. There can't help but be suffering mixed with the dollars he takes in and that subtracts enjoyment from the spending of them. I know that if I were to start a business where instead of paying my men a day wage or so much per piece produced, I could share evenly with them the wealth or profit produced by their labour—"

Rosalie interrupted, her eyes shining, her face aglow: "You'd be doing something for your fellow-man—really doing it—not just talking it."

He continued evenly as if she had not interrupted him. "If I were at the head of a business run on this basis, I would make less money per labourer, it is true—a great deal less than the average manufacturer with whom I would be competing. But to make big money, all I would have to do would be to employ a large enough number of men and the sum total of my small net profit per individual would be a big enough gross to satisfy any board of directors."

"And your workmen would be happy—they would have money to do with—and their contentment would show in their work," said Rosalie enthusiastically.

"Pshaw, Rosalie," said Dave a little ashamed, "you're taking it too seriously. One man believes in grinding money out of his men—I believe in letting them help you make money. Different viewpoints—that's all. Just plain, cold business."

"Business of love, I call it," she said earnestly. "If all 'business' were like this, the world would be a pleasanter place to live in. And what's more, David Power, if there weren't people watching us, I'd give you a great big hug and kiss for that thought of yours. You've the kind of a heart I wanted in my man and I love you for it. You're thinking about something besides your own selfish happiness—you're planning and working for the good of people who can't help themselves, and it's wonderful, simply wonderful!"

Though he showed no outward sign, Dave's mis-

givings made his heart sink within him. Rosalie was taking this thing far too seriously, too earnestly and honestly. What would she think—what would she do if she knew the sordid motives that really lay behind all this outward show of philanthropy? To himself he admitted, almost to his own surprise, that had he foreseen the way her sweet, clean mind would respond to the carefully calculated motives behind the project—money or no money, he would have thought twice before going ahead.

"Anybody can make money." Rosalie was in deadly earnest now. "Rogues and dishonest men of all kinds do that. But David Power, though they say you have done big things with the Carbovale Company, this is a far greater thing you have in mind. And what is more, it has given me a glimpse of your soul. The thought is a reflection of the real you, and what it means to me you'll never know."

"Please, Rosalie," he pleaded—and then almost in desperation he changed the subject abruptly: "What time do you think we had better start back to the city?"

But though it did not recur again in conversation, the new project was uppermost in both their minds as the grey roadster pointed its powerful nose in the direction of New York City.

The couple were anxious to get settled and, as the result of much search and many calls, a West End Avenue apartment was selected. And for weeks after they moved in Rosalie busied herself with the furnishings.

As Dave's home began to shape itself, Invader

Steel too began to drop something of its nebulous form and assume the aspect of a real, tangible thing. The press work had been cleverly done. Following the first newspaper interview with Dave, Gail Rogers, apparently as the result of the deep impression made by the idea, recommended with much attendant publicity that such a company be formed, both for the sake of the underpaid workingman and the capitalist who wanted clean profits. Then, once the thought began to take hold of the public mind, the question of the proper man to head the new concern arose, and very naturally, owing to his work in Carbovale, the name of David Power was proposed. Finally Dave, influenced by the pressure brought to bear, agreed to form the new organization. Then, as the final artistic touch on the little playlet, the directors of Carbovale, awaking too late to the fact that they were going to lose the most valuable man in their employ, refused to accept Dave's resignation one moment before the new mills absolutely demanded all of his time. Which, of course, left him in the desirable position of continuing the old work and promoting the new organization at one and the same time.

So, the stage having been properly set, David Power and Gail Rogers proceeded to organize the corporation. And very naturally—and of course very quietly—an agreement was entered into with the Union Brokerage Company to market the stock issue. These details attended to, they were ready for action and Rogers began to gather his influential friends on the directorate of Invader Steel until that body looked like a combination list of the philanthro-

pists of America rolled into one with Dun and Bradstreet's double A-1 list.

In the fever of organization the months passed quickly. Only perfunctory efforts were put back of the operating plans. Although experts drew them up and prepared the statistics and prospectuses, Dave's real genius manifested itself—of course incognito—in the efficient manner in which the early stock issues were marketed through a shrewd combination play on philanthropy plus the prospect of enormous profits.

Now that Dave was in—deeply in—he put aside all thoughts of his hypocrisy with Rosalie, and played to win. Money was raised rapidly. Times were favourable. The proposition had a peculiar appeal. And more than a million dollars had been paid in since the day Rosalie and Dave first saw the rumours of the project in the papers. Then an incident occurred which crystallized Dave's vagrant compunctions and made him realize the close relations which really existed between his business and his home.

Dave had agreed to meet Rosalie at the Country Club. He found her seated on the porch with Colonel Gray, multi-millionaire, founder of libraries and a noted philanthropist. The Colonel had known Rosalie since childhood.

The two were seated with their backs toward Dave, and as he stood for a second in the doorway he caught Rosalie's words.

"Colonel Gray, this Invader Steel that Dave and father are working on is a wonderful thing. Have you heard of it?"

"Yes, I have," the Colonel was gracious. "In fact, several attempts have been made to interest me in it."

Dave bit his lip and stepped out on the veranda.

Rosalie greeted him, and with a pretty little air of command bade him be seated and turned back to the other man.

"You were saying, Colonel, that someone explained the Invader plan to you—and did you buy?"

"To tell you the truth, I did not."

"Colonel Gray, I am surprised."

"Why?"

"Simply because you give thousands and thousands of dollars every year to loosely organized charitable enterprises to alleviate suffering. And then when you are asked to invest—not give—money in a business that is governed by principles that insures independence and comfort to thousands of employés, and a clean profit to the stockholders besides, then you refuse! Do you wonder that I am surprised?"

"My dear child, you put a different light on the matter." She really did not, but Colonel Gray was fond of Rosalie and it pleased him to hear her take the stand she did. "How do you know so much about this business?"

"Because I've lived it and dreamed it ever since Dave first conceived the idea. And, Colonel, if you could only see the way father and he are working on this thing—how they plan and slave and work and never tire. And it isn't the money—you know that; so far as father is concerned at least—and Dave doesn't care anything about money—" Her husband

winced imperceptibly as she continued. "You know that it must be something real or they wouldn't waste their time."

The Colonel was amused. "Your father, Rosalie, is a good business man; I hear the same of your husband," with a side smile at Dave. "Their judgment is good. But—" he hesitated and then his words came fast and addressed directly to Dave, "I wouldn't touch this thing with a ten-foot pole if Shapiro and Carruthers are mixed up in it—with due apologies to you, sir, for my opinion of your employers. How about it?"

Before Dave could answer, Rosalie replied indignantly: "They're not—their God is money. Dave is only staying on with them until Invader is ready to start, because they need him so badly they won't let him go until the last possible moment. And the reason he has started this new company is because they wouldn't let him put the idea into Carbovale as he wanted to—they are too selfish and grasping. Isn't that so, Dave?"

And the "Yes" he gave as an answer was the hardest word he had ever had to utter in his whole life.

He looked uneasily away. Why didn't Rosalie stop? And for the life of him, he could find no excuse to interrupt or change the subject. She was speaking again and her tone was prettily wheedling.

"Now, Colonel Gray, you're used to 'donating money'; this time I want you to invest some—in Invader Steel. It will be the finest thing you have ever done—and quite the nicest, too. And—if you

wouldn't mind—I'd like your permission to let the newspapers mention that you have come in." Which was a deft drive at one of the Colonel's little weaknesses. "Won't you, please?"

Dave was on pins and needles. This last argument—the suggestion that ample personal publicity would attend large subscriptions to the stock was a strong point of their selling campaign. Where had Rosalie dug it up, why had she used it?

The Colonel cleared his throat. "Rosalie, you've given me a fresh perspective on this matter—and a very interesting one, I might add, a very interesting one. I believe I'll write you a little cheque."

"Make it a great big one," coaxed Rosalie, highly pleased with the evident result of her persuasion.

And that night, driving home in their motor, she gently pressed into Dave's hand a slip of paper, Martin Gray's cheque for fifty thousand dollars, payable to The Invader Steel Company.

He looked ahead at the impassive, grey uniformed back of the chauffeur and slowly folded the cheque. He was very silent, very solemn as Rosalie nestled close, awaiting the praise which was so tardy in coming.

"Aren't you pleased, dear?" she asked. "Fifty thousand dollars—it isn't much, but I wanted to help. And I have, haven't I?"

And Dave, suppressing a wild desire to tell her once and for all not to soil her dainty hands with Invader Steel, took her in his arms and kissed her. And as he held her tight to him she whispered a message that made him cry aloud and then kiss her again—even more tenderly than before.

The morning was well along when Shapiro, as was his custom, strolled into Dave's private office at the Steel Company and seated himself in one of the leather chairs, lighting a fresh cigarette and snapping his gold case noisily shut.

"Been waiting for you," said Dave briefly, sweeping his papers into a drawer of the desk.

"Well, what's on your mind this morning?" asked the lawyer.

"This!" and Dave silently handed him the Martin Gray cheque.

Shapiro glanced at the amount, then laid it on the desk and chuckled.

"Been selling a little block of it yourself, have you?"

"No." And Dave looked sharply at the other man.

"Where'd the cheque come from, then?" asked Shapiro casually.

"Rosalie sold that stock."

"Who?" Shapiro was startled.

"You heard aright—my wife."

The lawyer laughed.

"That's going some—even your wife is interested in our little flyer. It's a good joke on the Colonel."

"Not a bit of it." Dave's words cracked like a whip lash. "If there is a joke, it's on me. But this is not comedy—it's tragedy! Shapiro, listen to me. That little girl thinks this thing is on the square. She got that fifty-thousand-dollar cheque simply because out of her own deep belief she made another believe. It's going too far, I tell you; it makes me shudder when I think of what would

happen if she learned the truth about Invader Steel. Now do you understand?"

"Yes, I believe I do!" Shapiro's words came slowly and thoughtfully and they reflected something on the deep friendship for the other man that lay back of his outward shell. "I understand that you, Dave, are very much in love with your wife and afraid that one of these days her eyes may clear and she will find that her idol's feet are made of clay like the rest of us."

David Power stood rigidly erect.

"Exactly—you've said it for me and I'm not afraid to admit the truth. And for the reason you just outlined so plainly, something has to be done. What's more, I know what that something is and I'm going to do it—right away."

"Yes—what are you going to do?"

"The way we're heading now, when the cash is all in, we divide the stock selling profits, steer the good ship Invader so she will collide with Emmerson and—let her crash. Right?"

The lawyer nodded. Dave resumed and a steely note crept into his voice.

"When that happens, we are swindlers—yes, that's the right word. I know you have enough legal nets around to fend off prosecution—there may not even be trouble—but the one thing you can't prevent is the eventual leakage to the world at large of the fact that we are a crew of pirates, trading on sacred sentiments—hypocrites for the sake of gain."

The lawyer lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Are you getting maudlin—weakening?" he asked.

"Not a chance. I'm going through to the limit and back again. To you I frankly admit what I am. But my wife sees me in a different light and, by the Seven Gods, I'm going to make good—for her."

Silence. Then Shapiro spoke calmly and evenly.

"This Gray subscription matter has got on your nerves. Just tear up the cheque and forget it. You don't want to quit now."

"Certainly not! Nothing is farther from my mind. You don't understand—instead of 'quitting,' I'm going clear through—farther than we ever dreamed of going. I'm going to do something besides sell stock, buy your junk mills and wreck a competitor. Invader Steel is going to be just what we represent it to be. I am going to make the swindle legitimate."

"Don't be foolish." Shapiro raised his hand deprecatingly. "The promoter who could make this thing a successful business enterprise hasn't been born yet. Man alive, be sensible—pocket your profits from the stock sales—put a spike in Emmerson's gun and forget it. This proposal of yours is suicide. Here, I've been sitting up nights planning ways and means of getting out from under and you're frantically trying to stick your head back in the noose. This thing was built to sell and sink, not operate. You'll pardon my talking freely, but you haven't been married long enough to have a sane view of things; you're head over heels in love. Wait a while until you regain a rational view of affairs in general and you'll realize that a move of this kind would be folly of the first water. In sixty or ninety days at the most, your wife's interest will have shifted to

something else. Don't be in too much of a hurry."

"I'm tired of talking," said Dave quietly. "But this much I will say to you: I know men—and women. And my judgment—not my heart, but my head—tells me that Rosalie has found in the purposes of Invader a permanent ideal. If that ideal ever crashes over and breaks—well, I'm afraid to even consider the consequences. It isn't going to happen if I can help it."

The lawyer nursed his chin thoughtfully in one cupped hand.

"What are you going to do?"

"You and Carruthers don't care much what happens to Invader Steel as long as you get your money and put Emmerson out of the way, do you?"

"No, you know we don't."

"Very well. I'll take it over. That's all."

Shapiro narrowed his lids and regarded his companion shrewdly.

"Of course, when we turn the properties over to you to operate, you will naturally forfeit your profits from the stock sales."

Dave looked at him and smiled.

"If that's a question the answer is 'No.' And if it isn't a question the answer is the same. I'll stay in on the profits or we'll all climb out together."

Shapiro threw back his head and laughed—long and heartily.

"That's the first symptom of sanity you've shown this morning. I'm glad to see that you've still got a grip on the main chance, even if you are about to champion the forlorn hope. I really asked you that question, Dave, just to find out whether your newly

discovered conscience had completely overturned your business acumen and I am certainly glad to find that your common sense is still on the job."

"Just forget that 'conscience' talk," Dave interrupted. "I never owned one. This is supreme selfishness on my part. Man, can't you understand? I've found happiness and I'm taking no chance of losing it. I haven't changed—only conditions—"

Shapiro interrupted by reaching out and impulsively grasping Dave's hand.

"All right, I'm with you. I still think you're a fool to do this—but you've got enough wisdom to make your folly stand a chance of turning into something substantial. Anyway, we're friends, aren't we? And what are friends for? I'll stick. And I'll see Carruthers today."

"You understand," drawled Dave, "I was not asking your permission. I was just informing you of my intentions."

"I'll tell Carruthers that," smiled the lawyer. "He'll appreciate the humour even on top of what I know he'll think of the rest of the idea."

Shapiro arose, preparatory to leaving. Dave opened the door for him and his next words came clumsy and hesitating like the speech of a bashful boy.

"I've got some news—good news. You're about the only fellow I'd care to tell it to. Shapiro, Rosalie and I are expecting that there'll be a—well, a new arrival in our family one of these days." His next words came with a rush. "And if it's a boy, we're going to call him 'Milton.'"

The lawyer gasped—then he grew red—and as

Dave embarrassedly headed off congratulations by pushing him outside, the motives behind the things he had just heard became as clear as crystal.

Dave, alone and much relieved, reached down in his desk drawer and produced the papers he had been looking at when the lawyer arrived. They were prospectuses used in the sale of Invader stock —statistics and figures on wages and labour profit production and a clip full of his own memorandums.

Silently he studied them, his head bowed in his hands. From time to time he made notes and figures. Finally finished, he swept the papers into a heap and looked at them, his under jaw set and lips compressed closely together.

"My job now is to make this stock broker's promise come true. And I'm going to do that little thing for *you,* Rosalie Power."

# XXVII

## AN OMINOUS INTRUDER

MONTHS passed like days, so filled were they with work and happiness. And as David Power sat one morning in the sunshine-filled breakfast room of his home, he found it hard to believe that he had a baby daughter a full seven months old that very day. And yet in a dainty white crib lay the proof, kicking and cooing and reaching tiny hands toward its proud parents. It seemed only yesterday that the mother, who sat across from him, had stood with proudly poised head listening to the words that made them man and wife. And Dave's face wore a half smile as he thought these thoughts —an outward sign of inward happiness.

Rosalie turned her chair and looked reflectively at the baby.

"Undoubtedly," she remarked thoughtfully, "she looks more and more like you every day."

Dave gravely considered the round baby face. "You're wrong," he said; "little Rosalie does look like one member of the family but it isn't myself. She is the living, breathing, miniature image of her mother." He arose and smothered his wife's protests in a great caress. "And that's the only way I'd have it—she should look like you—and she does."

His eyes fell on the face of a small clock on the wicker writing desk near by.

"Great Scott! nine o'clock. Girl, I'm going to be late again. I certainly must be on my way!" He patted her cheek. "You know I've got a big family to support now, so I can't afford to miss a single working minute."

She looked up at him tenderly.

"And that 'big family' is surely proud of you, David Power. Father told me yesterday that the way Invader is progressing is nothing short of wonderful. And you know he isn't usually very profuse with his compliments."

But the expression on Dave's face as he looked down at his wife had changed. There was a tinge of seriousness around his eyes as he spoke.

"Rosalie, honey," he said, "you've got to take better care of yourself. Here it's only early morning and you look tired. You know what Dr. Howse said——"

She interrupted him gaily.

"Worry is unbecoming to you, Dave. Never mind what the doctor said. He's an alarmist and so are you. I'm feeling perfectly fine—no matter how I look!" And she pouted becomingly.

Dave laughed as he kissed her good-bye, but once outside the door, the serious look returned and he shook his head. And instead of proceeding directly to the offices, he drove to the residence of Dr. Howse, one of the leading physicians of the city.

The doctor was engaged with his morning mail but when he looked up from his papers and saw his visitor a look of pleasure came over his face; some-

how or other people were always glad to see David Power.

"Hello there: a little early, aren't you? Sit down."

"Can't stay but a minute or two," said Dave briefly. "I'm on my way to the office."

"What's on your mind?"

"My wife!" said Dave soberly. "You saw her yesterday. Doctor, what is Rosalie's condition? Tell me frankly, please."

"Power—it's nothing—absolutely nothing that a little care won't bring out all right in the end."

"Speak up, man—don't give me generalities. I am not seeking assurances to ease my mind. I want facts, conditions as they are so that I may know what I must do."

The doctor looked shrewdly at his questioner before he made up his mind and answered. "All right," he said. "Since you put it that way, I will tell you the plain, unvarnished truth. Your wife has borne you a child. Some women are as strong as ever in thirty days; it takes others a year or more to fully recover their strength. And it so happens that your wife is of the latter type."

"Thank you," said Dave simply as he arose. "Just care—that's all that is necessary, you think?"

"Exactly: care; don't let her overdo things; plenty of rest; lots of fresh air; no sudden shocks—that is the most important of all; a big shock might kill her. I don't want to alarm you——"

Dave interrupted him. "You're not alarming—you are warning me. I thank you, Doctor."

"Better send your car back," suggested the doc-

tor, "and ride down with me. I'll be ready in a few moments and your company would be very welcome."

"Afraid I sha'n't have time." Dave looked at his watch. "I'm off schedule right now—got to hurry down town and get on the job." But the slow, thoughtful pace he took back to the motor belied his words.

Then, remembering a half-forgotten engagement, he turned his car off the boulevard and stopped at the Cricket Club, just in time to meet Carruthers who was in the act of leaving.

"Howdy, thought you'd let the fact that you were going to stop in here this morning slip your mind completely."

"Well, I almost had," rejoined Dave truthfully. "Just thought of it. How about that meeting this afternoon?"

"It will be held here—at the Club—in my rooms," answered Carruthers. "I've spoken to Rogers and Shapiro. Can you get here about three?"

"Suits me!"

"Now what do you suppose is going to be the subject of discussion?" and Carruthers grinned knowingly.

Dave's mind was still on Rosalie and Dr. Howse's injunctions. He shook his head. Carruthers leaned forward and whispered mysteriously.

"It's about dividing profits by four! The last share of stock of the Invader was closed out yesterday. All the cash is in the sock."

It so happened that Hebe had planned a shopping

tour that afternoon and Gail Rogers decided that since he had an appointment down town he would take his wife to luncheon.

Twelve-thirty found them seated at a window table in the main floor dining room of the Vanderbilt. Out of his great wisdom the captain seated Hebe where she had a full view of the room and placed Rogers with his back to the activities.

Luncheon duly ordered, Hebe proceeded to use her position of vantage to look around a little. Nobody she knew—the dining room was only about a quarter filled, for the hour was a little early. But as she was about to drop her eyes a familiar figure swung around the great Japanese screen that masked the entrance. Gerald Crane of Los Angeles was entering!

She looked out of the window, hoping he wouldn't see her. Not that it made any difference—but Gerald Crane was Gerald Crane and she was through with her past.

There was something a little unsteady about his walk. Out of the corner of one eye she noted how heavily he dropped into his chair—facing her, too, unfortunately.

Furtively she watched him. The waiter brought a decanter and he poured himself a stiff drink and tossed it off. Then and only then he looked at the menu card. And as the waiter was removing the bottle, he stopped him with a gesture and took another drink. Then he raised his eyes and looked around him.

Making the best of a bad situation, she nodded

to him as he stared in her direction and to herself made a fervent prayer that the matter would stop there.

Noting her greeting, Gail Rogers looked around.

"To whom did you speak?" he asked.

"Gerald Crane," she answered. "From Los Angeles—you certainly remember him?"

And Rogers smiled and bowed over his right shoulder to the man from out West.

Crane's stupefied senses telegraphed something to his brain and he slowly rose to his feet and walked to their table, a slight lurch manifesting itself in his gait.

"H'lo Rogers," he mumbled.

The other man shook hands with him a trifle disgustedly—plainly the oil operator was intoxicated.

"And Hebe—how's the old girl?" he asked with a leer.

Hebe covered a feeling of apprehension and anger with a bright smile and a diplomatic remark. The affair was rapidly becoming awkward—both men were standing, yet Crane made no move to leave. Finally as a matter of courtesy Rogers asked him to be seated.

His answer was to drag a chair from a nearby table and signal wildly to the waiter.

"I'm going to buy a little drink—what'll you have?"

In vain they protested; the drinks were ordered and served.

"Y'see," said Crane thickly, "I was out pretty late last night and I've got to repeat this evening. This life is pretty wearing on a simple western

fellow like myself," he leered, "and I've got to take something to keep me goin'." He lifted his glass.

"Here's happy days,"—he paused, revolving something in his brain—"Wait a minute—I've got a better one than that."

"Yes?" said Rogers politely, glass poised. How Hebe hated that drunken fool! What was he going to say? How could she get rid of him? She made a brave try.

"Here's to your affairs, may they always be prosperous," she smiled.

A sudden cloud overcast Crane's face. Instantly she knew that her toast had been a mistake.

He was speaking again.

"Never mind my affairs—they don't concern you —*any more.*" His tone was rude. "I said 'happy days,' then I thought of a better one. And you wished me prosperity. That'll be all right—but you can't kid me." His voice rose loud and harsh. "I say you can't kid me—Hebe—HEBE POWER!" And he chuckled sardonically.

Her heart skipped a beat as she caught the last word and she looked at her husband. Had he heard, had he caught the meaning of the oil man's inference? She could tell nothing from his face; it was calm and expressionless. He was going to speak; she listened.

"Our luncheon will be here soon. Let's finish our drink," were his words, a trifle too sharp in tone. Hebe wondered.

"A—right—sure—drink up and I'll go!" Crane turned and looked at the woman. In his eyes she

read vindictive hate. "But I want to drink a toast to Hebe CRANE!"

She could have killed him where he sat, but she restrained herself and forced a smile. The thing was simply terrible.

He stood up.

"Here's a toast—the one I nearly forgot. To Hebe—health and wealth to our friends and," he paused meaningly, "everlasting confusion to our enemies." He dropped his empty glass on the table and left without the formality of a farewell. She turned to her husband—he looked at her, his face as expressionless as a wooden idol.

"The man doesn't carry his liquor well," he remarked coldly.

And so the incident apparently ended. But Hebe's intuition caught an undercurrent of danger, invisible, not tangible, but there nevertheless.

As they finished their luncheon and walked to the hotel entrance, her husband turned to her.

"You take the motor if you wish; I'll use a taxi," he said.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To the Cricket Club."

"I can take you there."

"Never mind; I'll see you at dinner." And he left.

She thought a moment and turning back into the hotel, sought a telephone booth. The number she gave was that of David Power's office. She got the connection as he was about to leave for the meeting.

"Dave?"

"Yes, who is it?"

"Hebe—Mrs. Rogers. Dave, Gail and I were at lunch here at the Vanderbilt and Gerald Crane—from Los Angeles—came in, drunk, very drunk."

"What of it?"

"And I thought I ought to let you know what he said, so that you would be on your guard. First of all he called me Hebe *Power*. Do you understand?"

"Hebe *Power?*" Dave repeated.

"Yes. And then he called me Hebe *Crane!* I don't know whether or not Gail caught his meaning. He acted a little cool after it happened. Dave, I'm worried."

Dave quickly reviewed the thing in his mind.

"Was that all he said?"

"Yes."

"Nonsense! Forget it, nothing to it. You have too much imagination. The fellow is harmless. You'll have to excuse me now; I'm on my way to a meeting, just leaving when you called."

But Dave's reassurances did not make Hebe "forget it." And even Dave, lightly as he had taken the incident, looked sharply at the cold face of his father-in-law as they sat in Carruthers' room at the club.

The latter chewed a big cigar as he talked.

"This meeting is just to notify everybody formally that the stock is all cleaned up, the cash will be in the bank this week and we're ready to divide. Shapiro, what are the figures?"

The lawyer produced a pocket note-book and read from it:

"Ten million dollars' worth of stock sold. The

brokerage company's fifty per cent commission on that amount gives five million gross profit. The expense of selling was twenty per cent of commissions, or about one million dollars. Do you want exact amounts and detailed figures?"

"Never mind," grunted Carruthers. "Give us round figures and forget the itemized statements."

"All right: One million expense from five million earned leaves us a net of four million—one million dollars apiece for us. That's all, gentlemen."

Carruthers spoke rapidly.

"Everything's practically cleaned up—just a few little formalities to go through with and Shapiro will issue cheques within the next couple of weeks or so."

"Carruthers," Rogers was speaking for the first time, "do you think it wise to take this money in the form of cheques?"

"What do you want—gold?" Carruthers was contemptuous. "Send down a truck to get it if you do; we won't pay cartage. Say, do you think for a minute we're taking any chances? The money will come through the Shepherd's Bank—between Milton and myself we pretty nearly own the institution. We could commit murder on the premises and bury the body in their vault if we wanted to. How about it, Shapiro?"

"Not quite that." The lawyer was mildly amused. "However, I believe under the circumstances the cheque plan of payment will be perfectly safe." He looked at Dave. "And there's another little matter we might as well settle at this time—while we are all here together—and that is about

Power's future. I suggest that we make it so well worth his while to stay with Carbovale that he can't afford to leave——"

"Who said anything about his leaving?" grunted Carruthers, suddenly wide awake.

"He did," Shapiro proceeded smoothly. "And at the same time we permit him to act as the head of Invader. True, it is a peculiar position but we can make the public understand. Now then, when something happens to Invader, all he has to do is let go—let her slide and he's safe and secure in the saddle at Carbovale. It will do away with his leaving us and coming back when the other blows up."

Carruthers looked at Dave. Dave looked at Shapiro and smiled.

"You take a good deal for granted," he said, "but that's all right with me. And as long as you want to discuss the matter here, I'll settle it right now!"

Rogers was gazing out of the window, absorbed in his thoughts, but the other two were intent upon Dave's words as he continued.

"To cut a long story right short—I resign from Carbovale here and now—with the best feeling in the world for all of you and only one reason back of my going. And that reason is—I am going to make Invader make good."

"You're stark, raving mad!" shouted Carruthers.

A vision of the sweet face of Rosalie flashed across Shapiro's mind and he understood—and, understanding, laid his hand gently upon Carruthers' arm.

"No use arguing with him," he said sadly. "His mind's made up and you can't change it. I told him the same things that you are going to say, but he is determined. Let him do what he wants and save your words."

"You understand," said Dave, "I am not going to neglect Emmerson."

"Damn Emmerson!" said Carruthers expressively. "He's done us more harm now than I ever expected he would—indirectly he has been the cause of our losing you."

Unexpectedly Rogers rose to his feet.

"Is this meeting over, gentlemen?" he asked curtly.

"It is," answered Carruthers and looked at the door as it closed behind their partner.

"Didn't even thank us for making a million for him. And as for saying 'good-bye'! Well—even if he is your papa by marriage," he wrinkled his eyes at Dave, "I say he's an old crab. Well, guess I'll follow his example. I've got a fast foursome on this afternoon and if I do say it myself, my driving is getting better every day and I've a short mashie approach shot—but then, you fellows aren't interested in golf, so why waste breath on you? So long."

When they were alone, the lawyer turned to Dave and grasped him hard by both shoulders.

"You young fool, there's one good thing about this mess anyway. If the new company peters out, you've got a million in cash to fall back on—you can afford to fail."

"That," said Dave with tightly compressed lips,

" is the one thing that I can't afford to do—not if I had forty million to fall back on."

Within fifteen minutes of the time he left the club, Gail Rogers' car drew up at an office building near Columbus Circle.

" Hebe *Power!* "—" Hebe *Crane!* " What had that drunken fool meant? And Hebe's little start at the words—there was something back of it all. The fires of suspicion had been seething in his brain ever since the man had spoken. He couldn't stand it; the torture was growing worse every moment; he must pocket pride and get an answer to the question in his mind, settle things once and for all.

And he entered an office on the tenth floor which bore on the glass door the legend, " AMES, Investigator."

Evidently the owner of the office knew his visitor. Greetings were exchanged briefly and they got down to business.

" Ames," asked Rogers, " can you go to Los Angeles tonight? "

" I can—if there's a train—and I think there is," answered the detective, reaching for a time table.

And details settled, as the client left his office, the detective shook his head.

" Looking up his wife and son-in-law. The old gent's gone plumb crazy. What good will it do him to know? But—as long as he pays his bills, I should worry. If ignorance were bliss, I'd have to go out of business."

# XXVIII

## DETECTIVES—PROFESSIONAL AND AMATEUR

AS a detective, the man Ames was not brilliant but he was painstaking and thorough. And since the trail in Los Angeles was plain and clear, one week's work enabled him to bring back all of the important facts regarding the former relations of Hebe Norse, David Power and Gerald Crane.

Gail Rogers was at home, alone—Hebe was spending the day with Rosalie when Ames arrived.

"Did you get anything?" he asked.

"Everything," answered the detective, laying his report on the table.

The detective had hardly left the room before the report was out of its wrapper and being perused by eager eyes. At the first tell-tale paragraph, Gail Rogers clenched his fists and groaned, then by a stern effort gathered himself together and read every word.

The sheets fluttered from his hand to the floor. Like a man in a daze he picked them up and placed them in his pocket.

The butler entered.

"A man from Mr. Shapiro's office, sir," his voice was low. "He insists on delivering a message to you personally. Shall I show him up, sir?"

Controlling himself by a great effort, Rogers nodded assent.

It was the head of Shapiro's law office who entered. In his hand he held an envelope blank and white—not even addressed. This he handed to the other man.

"Sorry to have intruded, sir," he said courteously, "but Mr. Shapiro insisted that this be delivered into your hands by myself." And he bowed himself out.

Mechanically Rogers ripped open the envelope. A cheque fell into his hand. He gazed almost unseeing for a full half minute before its meaning penetrated his numbed comprehension.

The cheque was drawn to his order, signed by Milton Shapiro, and the amount was a round million dollars. It was his share of the spoils.

Then he laughed—a cracked, hysterical laugh—and began to talk aloud, something he had never done before in his life.

"I'm married—married to a woman who was the paramour of the husband of my daughter—and God knows how many more. And my dear son-in-law and his associates, they try to tie my hands with their dirty money. I—I——" His face contorted into a vicious grimace and he tore the cheque savagely, tore it twice, and then threw the bits of paper that represented a million dollars on the floor.

He raised his hands and cried bitterly: "Damn their money! Curse them! Curse her! Oh God!" He dropped into his chair, his head sinking low on the table, his hands clasped around the back of his neck.

Curiously enough his venom seemed centred on David Power. The woman still held his love. His

hate was crystallized on her past and those who had to do with it and of these Dave Power was the nearest. And his thoughts were as vicious as the darting tongue of a venomous snake.

Again a knock on the door. By an effort he pulled himself into a semblance of composure. It was the butler again.

"Two gentlemen to see you, sir. Here are their cards. Extremely important, they say, sir."

Rogers looked at the cards: King, publisher of *The Daily Courier*, and Kelcey, his managing editor. He ordered the servant to show them up, turning his chair with its back to the window so that his tell-tale face would be in the shadows.

Without the formality of shaking hands the two men seated themselves. Kelcey, last in, carefully closed the door behind him. Rogers waited their words in a sort of daze.

In the employ of the Shepherd's Bank was a youth named Jenkins who worked in the cancelled cheque sorting and filing department. On the morning of the preceding day, his services being unsatisfactory, he had received a notice of dismissal. While doing his work, a certain cancelled cheque in the vouchers of Milton Shapiro had won his interest, both on account of the unusually large amount and the person to whom it was drawn.

Ordinarily he would have passed the cheque into its proper pigeonhole and forgotten it, but under the circumstances, with no fear of losing his job since that had been accomplished, he folded the voucher, slipped it into the palm of his hand, and

thence into his pocket. When he went out at noon, he 'phoned his brother to have luncheon with him.

The brother was a reporter on *The Courier*.

"Walter," asked the bank clerk, "do the *Courier* people pay for news?"

"Sure they do—news tips, you mean?" The other nodded assent. "What have you got?"

"This," and young Jenkins handed over the cancelled voucher.

The reporter whistled as he looked at the amount.

"Gee, I wish it was mine. What's the idea? Say, you'll get in a nice jam holding this out from the bank—that's where you got it, isn't it?"

"Yep—and I won't get in any trouble because I was fired this morning."

"'Payable to David Power,'" the reporter said as he scrutinized the cheque closely. "He's the big Steel fellow who put over Invader recently, isn't he?"

"That's who I thought it was."

"Let's see," and the reporter drummed the table top with nervous fingers, "what can Shapiro be paying him a million bucks for, do you suppose? Say, let me have this cheque; I want to show it to the boss."

"What's in it for me?" inquired his brother. "I'm not doing this for love, you know."

"You'll get a five spot for your trouble, anyway; maybe more, if there's a 'story' in it."

And thus on the promise of a five-dollar bill did the proof of David Power's perfidy pass into the hands of outsiders.

As the editor of *The Courier* later viewed the cancelled million-dollar voucher various bits of gossip picked up here and there began to piece themselves together in his mind. Somehow he had the impression that Milton Shapiro owned the brokerage company through which the new steel company stock had been marketed. He took the piece of paper in to his publisher.

The two men talked it over. If the lawyer was issuing this sum on account of the Steel Company, why had he made it a personal cheque? The question was unanswerable and the stock selling connection rumour made them believe that there might be something back of it—and if there was a "story"—if Power was taking a back-door profit—it was big enough to spend time on.

"What shall we do?" asked Kelcey.

King thought for a moment, then looked up.

"You know the old third-degree police trick—that of putting a suspect where he can't get in touch with his accomplices, then telling him that they have confessed and blamed it all on him, and he in self-defence confesses in order to lay it back on his pals?"

"Certainly I know it," said the editor. "Who doesn't? It's old as the hills."

"But in spite of its age, it's being worked every day and successfully," continued the publisher. "Now we certainly can't get anything out of Shapiro—he's too shrewd—and I don't think we'll tackle Power, because I have a better idea: Gail Rogers was one of the promoters of Invader and he's the man in my opinion to try the 'third degree' on."

"Why, you can't lock him up in a cell," protested Kelcey.

"No, but we can get him alone and take him by surprise; that is just about as good."

"He's Power's father-in-law; certainly he isn't going to say anything to incriminate his daughter's husband."

"You never can tell what any man will do to protect himself—and that's the position we've got to put him in. Let's not waste time. Call a taxi and we'll shoot right out and interview Mr. Rogers about this matter." And with the words the publisher put on his hat.

As the two newspaper men, having ascertained by 'phoning that Rogers was in, boarded a cab, Jenkins, the reporter, stepped to a nearby saloon and met his brother.

"How much?" was the bank clerk's greeting.

"Fifty dollars!" the reporter was excited although his tones were low, "and say, boy, there's something big behind it all. I overheard the end of their talk—they're on their way out to see Rogers right now—the boy who called the cab telephoned his house for them to see if he was in and then hung up when whoever answered the 'phone said 'Yes.' And David Power and that lawyer, Shapiro, are mixed up in some way—it's about this Invader Steel business. It's big, I tell you."

Jenkins' salary in the bank had been fifteen dollars a week. On this, his first day out of employment, he had already earned a cool fifty and his imagination, spurred by the words of his brother, gave birth to another idea that promised lucrative

returns. He sought a telephone and located Milton Shapiro at the Barristers' Association.

"My name is Jenkins, Mr. Shapiro," he said politely enough. "You don't know me, but I have some valuable information for you," he put a meaning inflection in his next words, "regarding yourself and Mr. Power and Mr. Rogers in the Invader Steel." He added, "I used to work at the Shepherds' Bank."

Shapiro hesitated a second.

"Can't you tell me about it over the 'phone, Mr. Jenkins?"

"No, sir, you wouldn't want me to; and I can come right up if you say so."

The lawyer thought for a moment—the coupling of names and references to the bank decided him.

"All right; I'll wait for you."

Just about at the time that Jenkins arrived at the Barristers' Association, the newspaper men were seating themselves in Gail Rogers' library.

"Gentlemen," said their host in a low tone, "what can I do for you?"

Kelcey looked at his publisher and the latter nodded and took the lead.

"As representatives of one of the most powerful newspapers in the country, you will certainly understand that we come to you in the position of direct emissaries of the American public." King was making no attempt to be impressive; his manner was simple and direct.

Rogers nodded and strove to concentrate. In spite of his efforts his unstrung brain reverted again

and again to the terrible news he had just received. Blind flashes of hate, vicious, deep-lying hate for David Power sprang up like tongues of flame. King's tone was careless. "You and David Power were, I believe, responsible for Invader Steel—sponsored it, did you not?"

The name "Invader Steel" pulled Rogers together. Outwardly he was the same, but within him the result of long years of the sternest business concentration showed in the fact that, in spite of the mental burden he carried, the moment a matter of business appeared upon the horizon he was able to focus his mind powers.

"Yes?" he answered, putting a distinct note of inquiry in the word.

"There could be no chance of undue profits in the promotion of Invader for either Mr. Power or yourself—no 'graft'—stealing from the people who bought stock, could there?" asked the publisher smoothly.

Rogers hesitated—under ordinary circumstances he would have answered with a flat "No"—answered boldly and stood pat, but some devil of cunning within him made him swerve and go cautiously and his answer was a question.

"What are you driving at?"

For a second King paused, marshalling his mind forces like a general going into battle; then, for all the world like a police captain, he sprang to his feet, brought his fist down with a crash on the table in front of the other man and spread open before his astonished eyes the cancelled voucher for one million dollars.

"Just this!" he said, and the two words spoke volumes. His editor rose and stepped quickly to the side of Rogers' chair like an accusing witness.

Gail Rogers, cool enough now, picked up the cheque and examined it, turned it over, reading the endorsement as he replaced it on the table.

"Well, gentlemen?" he queried.

King staked his all on a flat lie—the "third-degree" trick as he called it.

"The fact that we have the cheque should indicate to you that there has been a leak. That piece of paper represents stolen money," his voice rose and thundered, "money stolen under the guise of philanthropy—and somebody is going to pay and pay dearly for this betrayal of public trust." His voice dropped to an ordinary conversational tone. "Now, Mr. Rogers, we are well disposed toward you on account of your position in the community—of the entire group, you are the man we are least inclined to prosecute. Will you co-operate with us or not? That's all I have to say. Now, let's have your side."

While the publisher was talking, the leaping flames of hate in Rogers' soul parted and revealed an easy path to revenge David Power. No thought of Rosalie, his daughter, or of consequences to others entered his mind; revenge and immunity for himself filled his soul and made him take the coward's path.

"Mr. King," he said slowly, "I am glad indeed that you and this other gentleman called this afternoon. You have aided me in answering a question—solving a very serious problem I have to decide. For an hour past, I have been wondering what it

was best to do." The man was a good actor. "I have been torn between a sense of honesty and duty on one side and—well—love for my child on the other.

"I have tried to think to whom I could best go in my terrible dilemma and your call answers my question." Rogers injected a little note of awe in his next words. "It is as if the hand of God had pointed out the way for me."

He wiped his brow with a handkerchief.

"I went into Invader Steel because I believed in the man who married my daughter—and, too, because she was intensely interested in its furtherance. Certainly the only thought of profit in my mind was that which would come later from legitimate operation—but the paramount attraction was the privilege of rendering what looked like a really great service to thousands of deserving labouring men and their families. Up to an hour ago, gentlemen, I sincerely believed that we were doing that very thing—believed it with all my soul. The ease with which capital was raised—the apparent sincerity of everybody connected with the project—everything made me believe the best and be proud of the part I played. But this afternoon I received a communication that absolutely tore down my ideals, destroyed my faith in human nature and made me realize that I had been an unwitting party to a—it's a harsh word but it fits—to a swindle!"

At that moment the telephone bell tinkled and excusing himself Rogers answered it.

It was Shapiro, wide awake to impending danger, with the two and two of the bank clerk placed to-

gether to make a very possible four, communicating with his partner to give warning.

"Rogers, have the *Courier* people been there yet?" The lawyer's voice was low but clear. "I must see you at once. How long will you be at home?"

Some deep buried sense of the dramatic stirred within Gail Rogers' breast and in full, cool command of himself he spoke into the black receiver. His words were like icicles.

"Yes, Shapiro, the newspaper gentlemen are here now. You cannot see me. I am about to tell them how you attempted to bribe me into silence—to make me a partner in your nefarious operations. I do not care to talk to you further, now or at any future time. Good day, sir!"

And he turned to his auditors. It looked as if the "big story" they had scented was about to break.

He leaned back and carefully gathered up the torn bits of the cheque which he had thrown on the floor and pieced them together on the table.

"One hour ago, gentlemen, to my great astonishment, I received from Milton Shapiro a cheque—a cheque payable to my order for the sum of one million dollars! I couldn't understand what it was for—the man owed me no money—and then, as I considered the matter, I realized that somewhere somebody had used the corporation for selfish gain. And I saw that the cheque was a bribe—an attempt to make me party to the crime and so close my lips. The sum was large enough to tempt almost any man."

Rogers straightened up and threw back his shoulders.

"But, gentlemen, here lies my answer. I tore the infamous thing to pieces. Had the man who sent it been here I should have thrown it in his face. By myself and of myself I refused the bribe!"

The newspaper men were silently comparing the torn cheque with the cancelled voucher they had brought. Rogers continued to speak.

"The cancelled cheque you have shown me proves that David Power, my son-in-law, is a party to this infamy, whether wittingly or merely a victim of too great temptation, I do not know. But family or no family, I cannot countenance his cashing that cheque —honour before all."

He paused. The thing was done. He had pulled down the house of cards around the head of David Power.

For a full moment after his telephone conversation with Rogers, Shapiro stood deep in thought, his quick mind deducing and putting together. His conclusions made, he 'phoned Carruthers, jumped into a cab and sought David Power at his home.

"Dave," said Shapiro briefly, "there's hell to pay."

"What particular kind?" asked Dave.

"I'll give you the whole story. I had a caller this afternoon, a discharged clerk from the Shepherd Bank. He told me that my cancelled voucher to you cleaning up your share of Invader had been stolen from their cheque vaults and was in the hands of a newspaper—*The Courier.*"

"Yes," said Dave, still undisturbed, "and what of it?"

"He further said that the publisher and editor were on their way to see Rogers. I figured that the story was true—the boy had too much information to be lying—so judging that the newspaper men were going to try to bluff our dear partner into telling something, I called him up."

Dave made no comment; his eyes were fixed on the lawyer.

"I asked Rogers if the *Courier* men were there. He said 'Yes' and then, obviously for the benefit of his audience, he became virtuously indignant, accused me of trying to bribe him, make him a partner in our 'nefarious operation' or something like that. The old hypocrite has turned us down—cold—to save himself; no doubt about it."

Dave walked the length of the room, turning the matter over in his mind, seeking motives, and suddenly memory of the drunken words of Gerald Crane came to him. There had been ample time to investigate. Yes, unquestionably there was the motive. To Dave's clear mind the whole thing was plain as day. He turned and asked:

"Are you sure he has turned traitor?"

"I'm so sure," Shapiro cut his words viciously, "that right now I'm blessing my lucky stars that we built this deal from a bullet-proof legal standpoint, otherwise I'd be seeing iron bars ahead. That's how sure I am."

"What's going to happen?" asked Dave thoughtfully.

"Well, in the first place, instead of being lauded

as a philanthropist, you're going to be branded by the press as a low-down crook. The whole thing is going to come out. There'll be suits and counter suits, but in six months or a year the whole thing will blow over and we'll have the money and a little blacker reputation. That's all," he added with a grin, " except that we'll divide the backslider's share —and that's some consolation."

" Not to me," said Dave briefly, and sat back drumming on the table. For himself he did not care; he could face anything, but he thought of Rosalie and shuddered. She would be injured most by anything that destroyed her faith in him. The doctor's warning about sudden shocks came back to him. Her physical weakness would make her unable to stand the shock; why, it might even kill her. His mind was made up the instant that last thought came to him. He hated to run like a coward, but for her sake—he turned and spoke.

" Shapiro," he asked, " what would happen if I disappeared until this thing blows over? "

" You're not thinking of running away? " asked the lawyer in surprise.

" No, I'm thinking of taking someone away, someone who is not strong enough to bear the shock this thing will bring—my wife," he answered soberly.

Shapiro nodded understandingly.

" That's so—she hasn't been strong since the baby came, has she? And so wrapped up in this Steel Company—it's too bad," here he actually sighed. " Just when you were counting on putting it on its feet, going to make a legitimate success out of it. I'm sorry, Dave—deeply sorry. But don't worry,

you can go; nothing will happen. Carruthers and I will weather the storm."

"All right—thanks, old man!" Dave reached out his hand in gratitude.

"Power, luck to you, boy; bank on us to pull you through. See me before you go, will you?" And the lawyer cleared his throat and wondered why he felt a little tendency to choke.

Dave turned and called, his voice light and merry as his soul was heavy and sad.

"Rosalie, where are you?"

"Coming, Dave; what did that lawyer man want?"

Dave regarded her with a smile—he seemed happy to her searching gaze but within his heart was racked and torn.

"He brought the best news I've had for a long time."

"Yes?"

"Do you know what we're going to do—we two and the little girl?"

"No, what?" and she nestled up close.

"We're going to take a long vacation—away from everybody, somewhere far off and quiet. And we're going tomorrow morning. What do you say?"

"Dave, it seems too good to be true—but—how about the new company?"

"That was the good news he brought, dear—Invader is now in shape to take care of itself for awhile." And as he gazed over her head the look in his eyes was one of positive agony.

# XXIX

## THE CRASH

UP near the south shore of Lake Superior lies a great tract of primeval forest, untouched by the hand of man except for the occasional blaze of a hunter's trail and one lone corduroy road passaging its depths—built in anticipation of lumberjacks who have never come.

Almost in the centre of this virgin forest is Lake Hekapac—sixteen miles long by three miles wide, with its deep blue, spring-fed waters sparkling and shimmering against a dark green frame of high, densely wooded shores.

A trout brook feeds into the lake, as does a wide river which takes its course over rocky falls and around winding banks with tall, ghostly, dead trees standing sentry over its never-ceasing passage.

On a sloping bank near the mouth of the river and commanding a view of the entire lake is a little clearing on which stand the only human habitations in this wilderness. Two large cabins built of the logs from the cleared ground on which they stood—a boathouse of the same material and a floating timber pier comprise the outfit.

This was the North Woods camp of Milton Shapiro—and here in the great solitude, David and Rosalie Power with their baby daughter had passed a full six months, isolated from humanity, seeing

no one but their Indian guides, living to and by themselves, and happy in the doing.

On the broad veranda of the main cabin David sat clumsily mending a broken reel. The brown flannel shirt he wore was scarcely darker than the tanned skin of his face and hands. Corduroy trousers tucked into oiled hunting boots comprised his attire—unless you cared to include the battered briar pipe on which he puffed contentedly.

A shadow fell across his work and he looked up, smiling into the face of Rosalie looking down at him over the baby in her arms.

"Dave," she said, "I just wanted you to look at the baby. She's getting bigger every day, I think, don't you?"

His smile widened and he laughed as he arose and pinched her cheek with more than a hint of tenderness in his action.

"Rosalie," and he gingerly patted the baby's head, "honestly, baby hasn't grown any in the last hour. And it hasn't been much more than that since you showed her to me before. But if you say so I'll take another look." And he pretended to scrutinize the child closely, then lifted his glance to the mother's face. "Anyway, it wasn't the baby that brought us here. It was you. And from the way you look and act I'm inclined to believe that prescription certainly did beat the doctor's dope. What do you say, girl?"

She smiled back at him.

"I never felt better in my life—and this time I *mean* it. Dave—when we first came here the loneliness nearly killed me. But as we stayed on

it left me and I came to love the woods and the waters and the solitude. And now I shouldn't care if we never went back. I could live on here forever. To me it's the most beautiful spot in the world."

He nodded and spun the reel to test its adjustment.

"When you asked me to come away, Dave, I knew what was in your mind—you were worried about my health. You see you didn't fool me—not even one little bit," and baby and all she burrowed under his arm.

Her words recalled unpleasant things. Flashes of the real reasons for their departure flashed across his mental screen. Invader Steel—Hebe—her father—one of these days he must take her back to civilization and she would learn—and then—the reckoning. For the first time he knew the soul-gripping clutch of fear.

The faint chug-chug of a launch across the still water made them both turn and listen. It was their boat returning from the south end of the great lake where the corduroy road gave access to civilization and supplies.

Dave opened his shirt a little wider at the neck.

"How hot it is tonight," he commented; "no air—no breeze—these clouds seem to be holding us in a red-hot baking oven."

"Yes," answered Rosalie, "the heat is a forerunner of rain. Good thing the boat is so nearly home. These storms the wind whips up are terrible—but they are so beautiful I almost forgive them their wickedness; that is," she laughed, "if there's no one out to be harmed."

The launch was running smoothly into the little bay. Rosalie laid the baby in the canvas hammock that swung from the rafters.

"Come on, Dave," she cried gaily, "let's see what he has brought from town."

Deftly the Indian guide shut off the engine, whirled his wheel and ran the little boat beside its mooring.

As Dave stepped in to help unload the supplies, the Indian, suddenly recollecting something nearly forgotten, reached into the bosom of his shirt and, producing a letter, handed it to the other man.

Dave looked at it silently. The second communication he had received in six months. It could be from but one person because only one human knew where they were. Shapiro had something of importance to communicate or he would not have written. Dave tore open the envelope and unfolded the letter.

He read it once almost at a glance. Then he went over it once more—slowly.

"My dear Dave:" it started.

"You can come back at any time now. Everything is arranged and although you will not find yourself quite as popular as when you left, at least the storm has blown over and we are all safe and sound—which is something to be thankful for at any rate.

"Sincerely,
"MILTON SHAPIRO."

So here was the end of the world. They were free to go back. And when they did—what then?

He could if he wished delay their return a few days —steal a few extra moments of happiness—but what was the use—it had to come and sure enough here it was. The dream was over. Sleeping and waking he had dreaded this moment since he had left New York half a year before, but now that it was here he would face it. His nostrils distended slightly and he tore the letter to small bits and cast it on the dark waters.

Rosalie looked at him in surprise as he stepped up to the landing and slipped his arm through hers.

"Come, dear, let's take a little walk. I've something to say to you."

"What's the matter, man o' mine," she asked jokingly, "was it bad news the letter brought?"

With the words she reached over and patted his brown hand reassuringly.

A sharp twinge of pain shot through him like a knife. Would she touch him tenderly like that after he had told her—for tell her he would—he must—the tale must come first from his lips—he would state his own case and hear and see the judgment with his own ears and eyes.

The humidity was becoming almost unbearable as he seated her on a great stone at the water's edge and dropped at her feet.

"Rosalie," he commenced haltingly, "we will go back to New York now—any time you say."

She mistook his emotion and leaning forward placed her hand tenderly on his head.

"Don't feel so bad about leaving, Dave. I love the place too. It has made me well and our little Rosalie has blossomed like a flower here in the

wilderness. We can come again. We must. I could never think of leaving here for good and all."

"That isn't it," he said miserably; "now that we can leave, there is something I must tell you—and God help me," he burst out, "I never knew I was a coward until this moment came. I'm afraid—just plain afraid."

She looked at him wide-eyed; this was a new David Power to her; what did it mean? He continued:

"I took you away from the city because you were not strong—I wanted you to build yourself up—regain your health."

"I knew," she gently interrupted him, "that's why you haven't even permitted me to correspond with father or Aunt Helen. You wanted the outside shut out."

"Yes—that was it," he clenched his fists, "but I took you away then because you weren't strong enough to stand what you'd have had to hear if you had remained!"

"Dave—what are you driving at? What do you mean?" She was startled, aroused.

"I'm alarming you. I know I hadn't ought to tell you this way. It's bad for you and bad for me. But I can't plan, I can't even think any more where you are concerned. I have to force every word I utter. Rosalie, I started Invader Steel as a money-making scheme—a swindle—yes, that's the word. I'm not afraid of it. And it all came out—that's why I took you away. I ran from the hue and cry."

She looked at him silently for a moment. A few drops of rain came down unnoticed.

"But, Dave," she said gently, "you tried really to make Invader what people thought it was, didn't you?"

"Yes," he bowed his head, "I did—I tried to make it what *you* thought it was."

She reached her hand toward him—in his surprise he made no move to take it.

"Then, Dave, since you did that for me, who am I that I should question or criticise the beginning of the thing? You proved your love far greater by trying to rebuild a pretence into what I thought it was than had it been worthy in the first place."

He looked at her with wonder in his eyes and a relaxation of the tense lines of his mouth. But he had more to say and he continued, her hand resting gently on his.

"The Steel Company was exposed by your father. There were certain phases of it over which I had no control—that I could not remedy. And his reason for exposing it was that he had found out something—his—he—Rosalie, I can't tell you the rest."

Neither spoke for a second. He gained courage from her hand now tightly clasped in his and continued.

"It was a woman—long before I knew you she was in my life——"

He paused—she looked at him silently, he noticed that the pupils of her eyes were dilating. And then suddenly the long-delayed wind began its rush across open waters. In the far distance a tree crashed to earth and long, sombre rolls of thunder resounded

over the wooded hills. And as it crashed and rolled away into silence, Dave haltingly proceeded.

"I never really cared for her. We were not married."

She spoke.

"Who was the woman?"

This was the question he had dreaded—the question that had better go unanswered. But she—she had a right to ask. And he answered—answered like a man giving his own death signal to a firing squad.

"Your father's wife!"

And then his words came in a torrent:

"And your father found out. Shapiro's call the day we left was to tell me and warn me that the whole country would know within forty-eight hours. Pricking the bubble—bringing the house I builded for you down around our ears—that was your father's revenge for a wrong that I never knowingly did him. God, girl, for myself I didn't care—but you—you were so weak, dear, I was afraid—afraid of what the shock might do to you—so I played coward. I took you and ran away from everybody and everything and kept you hidden here until you were well and strong so that you could bear to hear the things you must learn and pass judgment upon me—your husband."

He bowed his head in anguish, but no hand crept forth to soothe and reassure him. Only her voice—forcing the words against the wind.

"Why do you tell me these things?"

He stood upright. Around his brow his long hair lashed and blew in the fierce wind.

"Because—you are strong now—and we can go back. And because—these things must come to you first from my lips—I knew that I could never rest until you knew all—everything—and had judged me."

"And you ask for forgiveness?"

A few drops of rain began to patter down unnoticed.

"No——" Dave spoke bitterly. "I ask only for judgment—not even for mercy." A sudden revulsion of feeling came over him. "Oh, my Rosalie," his voice choked and he held out his arms.

For a moment she stood like a woman of stone, then suddenly galvanized into action, struck down his outstretched arms and turned and ran like one possessed toward the dark forest fringe on the edge of the clearing.

He sprang after her—caught her in his arms—she did not struggle or fight but looked up at him and in her eyes was a look of agony—soul deep hurt—like an injured wild thing—and he understood.

"What were you going to do?" he asked unhappily.

"Go away, away from you, for good and all."

He looked deep into her eyes and read the message aright—then he picked her up in his arms and strode to the house.

Still the thunder rumbled—the raindrops were coming down faster now.

"Remember," he said in a low tone, "you have someone left to care for," and then he added bitterly, "even if I have not."

He pushed open the rough door and laid her on the couch, then turned to the guide who was sitting by the side of the baby's bed.

"Mrs. Power is indisposed," he said briefly. "Take care of her—I am going to town."

"Heap storm!" ejaculated the Indian in surprise.

But he got no answer for David Power was well on his way to the pier.

As he leaped lightly into the birch canoe and pushed it into the lake—lightning flashed and the rain came down—in sheets—in torrents—the heavens had opened up their wrath and were pouring it out.

And fighting—paddling like one possessed, he made his way across almost impassable waters to the opposite point, and lifting the canoe as lightly as a feather pushed it completely out of sight in the underbrush.

"Lord, what a mess I've made of it," he thought sadly, "but I'll give her tonight to think it over. Maybe she'll change her mind—Rosalie is a woman and women sometimes do that."

And with the most lost and forlorn feeling that ever habited human breast he settled into the dripping underbrush and prepared for his all night vigil in the storm.

The morning broke cloudy and cold. Soaked to the skin—weighed down with a heart of lead, Dave launched his canoe and paddled back through the chilly mist to the clearing.

Rosalie was in the great living room—alone——

She looked at him silently—her eyes full of misery but unsoftened by tears.

"I came back," he said haltingly, "to see—to ask you—we were both wrought up and excited last night, I thought——" Suddenly he cast aside his faltering words and straightened up proudly before her. "Rosalie—give me my sentence."

Slowly she spoke and the words came like drops of vitriol on Dave's bleeding heart.

"I hope," she said, "that you go and go quickly—and that I may never lay eyes on you again."

For a second Dave stood, his mouth thin and grim as death—then he turned to obey.

"Before all things on this earth," he said solemnly, "I have put you—Rosalie—and always it will be the same—forever and forever until I die."

And ten minutes later when she walked out onto the veranda, a shaft of moist sunshine cut the fog and she saw his canoe, a white speck on dark waters, headed for the corduroy trail.

# XXX

## PICKING UP THE PIECES

LIKE a man in a dream, Dave stumbled over the miles of corduroy road to the little town of Ballantine, where he recovered his senses enough to purchase a black Stetson and an old coat to cover his soaked shirt.

And it was in this disreputable attire that he walked into Milton Shapiro's office in New York City forty-eight hours later.

"Great Scott, man," Shapiro was plainly and evidently delighted to see him, "you're a quick actor all right. Started back just about two seconds after my letter got there, didn't you?"

"Yes," responded Dave dully, "I came right back."

The lawyer caught him by both shoulders and appraised his friend. The bronzed face spoke of health and hardiness but around the eyes was a drawn look that was new, a look that had never been on David Power's face before.

Shapiro's words came slowly.

"I'd say the North Woods agreed with you if it wasn't for that peculiar look around your eyes."

"Oh, I'm fit as a fiddle," answered Dave wearily, then to change the subject, "what's the news down here? About the things I'm interested in, I mean, of course."

"Lots of news. For instance, Rogers has been in South America for a couple of months."

"And his wife?"

"She's with him. Dave, that old man's actions are another proof that when a woman pulls the strings we all jump, willy nilly, right or wrong. In spite of what he knew, he didn't have the moral courage to give her up. She had him roped and tied."

Dave nodded idly. His mind persisted in wandering back up to the little camp on Lake Hekapac; only the sternest exercise of will power brought him back to the present.

"How about Invader?"

"Well, the newspapers made an awful commotion, as I anticipated they would. But pretty soon it ceased to be news, wore itself out. Legally of course we were bullet-proof in spite of your father-in-law's treachery and the only result of his little attack is that we have his share to divide and there seems to be a bad odour in the atmosphere when our names are mentioned in public. However, that will wear off in time. The thing is all cleaned up as far as we're concerned and the money is in our pockets, so what's the difference?"

"None, I suppose." Dave fumbled in his pocket for a cigar and placed it in his mouth without lighting it, then abruptly, "What's going to become of the Invader properties we had under way?"

"You know—but really you don't know so I'll have to explain. Our beloved stockholders have been fighting like a bunch of wolves to close it up so they can realize on what's left and get fifteen

cents or so on their dollars. As a matter of fact, the receiver is selling out the holdings next week. Well, that's about all the news I have," said the lawyer, settling back in his chair. "Now, suppose you give me some. How's the family and where's your wife? At a hotel?"

"No," answered Dave slowly, "she's still up at the camp."

"How's that?" asked Shapiro in surprise, knowing that the two were inseparable. "Is she sick, Dave?"

"Yes," answered Dave, the emotion that almost mastered him showing for once in his voice. "She's sick—sick of *me*—through!" And he added wearily, "I don't know that I blame her. I'm a pretty poor stick, I guess."

"The devil you say!" ejaculated Shapiro in genuine concern. "On account of what, this mix-up here?"

"Yes."

"How did she find out?"

"I told her."

"About Invader?"

Dave nodded.

"And the other woman?"

Again Dave bowed his head.

"You chump! You poor unsophisticated wise man!" Deep feeling lay behind Shapiro's words. "And I can see you now telling her. Cold as ice, not pleading your case nor showing extenuating circumstances, just giving the damning facts. Dave, Dave, the thing I've loved about you is that you never seem to lose your head, but every man slips

and this is where you've made a terrible blunder. Women don't want cold facts, my boy. They want honey-coated things—their pills must be concealed in chocolate drops."

"I wouldn't have it any different," said Dave dully. "I told her—as you say—she knows the facts and she has judged me. And even for the sake of having her I wouldn't deceive and sugar-coat and sweeten the nasty truths."

"Give her time. Stay away for awhile until she thinks it over and cools down. She'll take you back. Women always change their minds you know."

"Some women do, but not Rosalie," said Dave sadly. "She's so sweet and clean and fine that she'll never recover. The thing is ended, closed. I've that feeling—and my premonitions are sound."

Shapiro looked meditatively at the other man. He knew that this was no ordinary marriage, but an affair of true love and that the hurt of the man before him was soul deep, so out of the very real and very deep affection he entertained for his youthful partner he felt a sympathy that made his heart go out to the man before him.

"What can I do, Dave?" he asked simply.

"That brings us down to cases," Dave's eye brightened and his shoulders straightened, "that's why I came here. I want your help. How good a friend of mine are you, Milton Shapiro?"

The lawyer's answer came without hesitation.

"Just good enough to do anything you ask. That's a promise made before I know your request. Consider it so."

"All right. I'll take you at your word. I'm going to write you a cheque payable to your order, for my share of the Invader moneys. It amounts, I believe, including my third of Rogers' share, to something over a million and a quarter dollars."

"Right. And what am I to do with it?" the lawyer smiled. "Keep it in trust for your wife?"

"No. Don't joke. Rosalie is wealthy in her own right. She doesn't need money. You are going to execute for me a commission that means more than anything any man ever has or ever will do for me again."

"What is it?"

"How much do you expect the Invader properties will bring at the receiver's sale, Milton?"

"Probably about half a million. Why?"

Dave replied slowly and deliberately:

"Because I want you to take that dirty money of mine and buy it in."

"What?"

"You heard me. And after that I ask you to take what's left of the cash and finance the outfit, make it a real, living thing instead of a stockbroker's wreck. And I don't want a living soul except yourself to know where the money is coming from, either."

"But, Dave, I don't understand——"

"Then I'll explain. I can't undo the woman thing. God knows I wish I could, but that stain can't be wiped out. But if you can make Invader a go, Rosalie would be happier, I know. It's the

one thing I can do. Oh, what's the difference, Milton, whether you understand or not? Will you do it?"

"Certainly I'll do it. But not so fast—a moment ago you spoke of my 'making it go.' How about yourself? Why don't you take hold?"

Dave hesitated a second before replying.

"I sha'n't be here. I'm going away."

"Where—when?" the lawyer was startled.

"I'm going now—today. I'm going as far as I can get. Just where I don't know. I'm tired—for the first time. I'm through. That money cost too much—it cost the one thing that to me meant life and since I've lost that one thing—well—I'm going to steal off somewhere and exist."

"Bosh! You're talking like the hero in a cheap novel!"

In spite of himself, Dave laughed.

"I know it. And the worst of the whole thing is that I mean exactly what I say. Now, all I want from you is your assurance that you'll do your best for me. Have I got it?"

"Certainly," the lawyer focused his two keen eyes full on his friend. "Listen to me, David Power! It's seldom I take the trouble to unbosom myself to another man but I'm going to take the liberty of giving you a little straight talk for your own good. You're a sinner. You married a saint and you're paying the penalty. A long time ago, my boy, I arrived at certain conclusions regarding women and by carefully regarding those rules of the game I have derived much pleasure, gathered no regrets and avoided all the heartaches and

troubles born of centralizing your affections upon one single object.

"And it isn't too late for you to turn over a new leaf and profit by my experience, leaving the past to take care of itself and building the future by the rules that insure happiness so far as women are concerned."

He paused and looked keenly at his auditor.

"To win the love of one woman a man must spend much time. And in the seeking he jeopardizes his own peace of mind, his heart. If he fails in his quest, much suffering is the result. If he succeeds, he wins—one woman and the privilege of spending the rest of his life holding what he has.

"Now, speaking plainly, I seek only the woman whose company I can buy—for money. Don't misunderstand me. That statement is broad enough to cover everything from the most innocent to the worst thoughts you have in mind. I purchase only the choicest and most select wares the city has to offer. My wooing—a telephone call. The woman comes into my life only when I am in the mood. And it is all light and laughter and endeavour to entertain and amuse me. The darker side of whims and temperament and storms are avoided. For, you see, I pay my price in cash for pleasure. What matter how these women really feel toward me? What if their sweetness and kindness is assumed? So are the parts of the characters on the stage, yet if the actors are clever you enjoy the play. And when I tire, I pay. The incident is closed, ended, and I am again free to pick and choose, master of myself."

He leaned forward and put his hand on David's knee.

"My friend, I can't admire myself in the cold light of the things I have just told you. But I'm older than you, I've had more experience. I want to give you the benefit of it. Forget your wife. I know you'll say it's impossible, but all things come to pass with time and the right company. Play my game. Avoid the exhilaration of the climb to the heights lest you slip and plunge to the depths."

Dave arose.

"I know; all that you say is true. But—it's too late." He smiled wanly. "I'd rather have my memories, even if I can't have her, and those memories I'll keep sweet and clean to the end."

Shapiro looked intently at the other man. For fully three minutes neither spoke. Finally the lawyer broke the silence:

"One more thing. Then I'm through. I can't look at it the same way you do. I can't understand it. She cares for you. You care for her. This little thing makes you part. She suffers. You suffer. It isn't fair. It isn't right. You're acting like the average damn fool man. I expected something different from you, Dave Power."

And out of the protest came a thought that struck Dave square between the eyes. And as the full meaning of his thought dawned upon him, as if by magic the lines disappeared from around his eyes and a great wave of warm emotion surged up within him. He arose to his feet and struck the mahogany desk a resounding blow with his great fist.

"Shapiro," he said, "she's a woman and I'm a

fool. And I'm going back to the North Woods today—on the next train. Will you go with me?"

"God bless you, yes," answered the lawyer. "Going to make one last grand try? That's the stuff."

"No, not to make a 'try,'" and in Dave's voice was the jubilation of victory, "I'm going back to stay."

"I don't understand," muttered Shapiro to himself as Dave called the railway office, "going back to *stay*. Wonder what he means?"

# XXXI

## HAPPINESS DEEPER THAN WORDS

"SO this is where you and Dave have been hiding?" said Helen Ainsworth, looking around the cabin and drawing her furs about her, for the room was cold in spite of the log fire that Pierre had built in the stone fireplace.

"Well, at any rate, I am here, Rosalie. After riding on such trains as I never dreamed existed, walking a road of logs for a thousand miles and getting wet to the skin in that little boat, to say nothing of inhaling gasoline fumes enough to asphyxiate me, I have arrived."

"It was kind of you to come, Aunt Helen," answered Rosalie listlessly. "You were the only soul I felt I could call on."

Mrs. Ainsworth looked narrowly at the other woman.

"What's it all about? Where is Dave?"

"Gone!"

"Gone where?" For once the older woman was startled.

"I don't know. I sent him away. There—there was another woman!" And Rosalie turned her head away to hide the expression she knew must be on her face.

"I don't believe it!"

"It's true. He told me so himself."

"Still I don't believe it. He's too deeply in love with you even to look at another woman. That much I know."

"You don't understand. Not since he married me, but in his past."

"O Lord! Rosalie, sit down and tell me what has happened so I can make head or tail of this thing."

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Neither do I, but you can't expect me to play comforter, give advice or whatever it was you sent for me for, unless you give me some information. Do you realize that when I received your telegram, I got up from a bridge game, called up to find out the next train to this forsaken spot, and took it without question? Doesn't that entitle me to some consideration? I want to know what it's all about. Right now. This moment!"

Rosalie looked down as she spoke. The tears were perilously near.

"I thought Dave took me away because he wanted me to regain my health. I was ill, you know, after the baby came. But he brought me here and hid me away because he was afraid that the exposure of Invader might be too great a shock for me to stand. You know about that?"

"Yes, I do. And mighty considerate it was, I'd say. Knowing Dave as I do, I'm certain it wasn't fear for himself. When did he tell you about this?"

"The day before I telegraphed you. And I sent

him away. I was afraid to go back, afraid to stay here alone. I didn't know what to do, so I sent for you."

"Yes? That isn't all?"

"And when he told me about the Steel Company, how it started as a swindle and he tried to make it legitimate because I thought so much of it, I told him I forgave him for that."

"You had nothing to forgive him for. Go ahead."

"And then he told me—oh, God, I can't say it, but I've got to tell you, tell somebody! It's killing me! He told me that there had been a woman in his past."

Rosalie buried her head in her hands. Mrs. Ainsworth looked at her and purposely made her words so icy cold that they brought the girl back to her senses.

"How did he come to tell you about the woman?"

"He—he felt he had to. You see, the woman was the one that father married!"

"Your stepmother?"

Rosalie nodded.

Mrs. Ainsworth looked away at the fire, then back at the girl and her next words came more gently.

"You haven't said yet how he came to tell you this."

"Father found it out in some way and in revenge he exposed Invader."

"Oh," and Mrs. Ainsworth pursed her lips contemplatively, "now I understand a lot of things I

didn't before. He has taken his wife to South America, you know."

Both women sat in silence, occupied with their thoughts. Finally Aunt Helen spoke:

"Rosalie, there are two courses I might pursue. One is to play the sentimental, loving aunt and agree with you that your husband is a terrible character and let you sob on my shoulder and help you get a divorce. That would probably be the easy way. But I'm not going to take it. I'm going to talk hard sense to you, which is a mighty foolish thing for one woman to do with another, and try to make you see this thing in a different light.

"I know a lot more about life than you do—or ever will know, because you will always be sheltered by the love of David Power, and in spite of what you think of him at this moment, his love is the greatest shelter any woman I've ever known has had.

"Perhaps at your age, Dave's past might have looked to me as it does to you—though I doubt it. At my age, the things you have told me about him don't lower the man in my estimation. They don't even disappoint me. For, no matter how much any woman may rant or rail against the double standard of morals, it exists and men suffer from it as well as women.

"You know, you can't help but know, that David Power would have given anything he ever hopes to possess rather than make that confession to you. No punishment hereafter could be greater than he suffered as he told you.

"The thing I see is not that he had a past—ninety men out of a hundred have—but that when it came

to the test he was man enough to tell you, instead of taking the chance that you might find out from someone else. And when he took you away rather than expose you to the blow of the attack on his company, he did a brave thing. For, to a man like Dave, running away takes more courage than fighting."

"I know, I know," moaned Rosalie wearily, "but I had thought that he was so fine and clean! How could he!"

"How could he, indeed!" Mrs. Ainsworth fairly snorted. "How could he help it? You don't realize, girl, the temptations young men encounter. Why, a man who is clean, actually has to make excuses to his companions, and the chances are that his excuses are not believed.

"Do you not realize the difference between the youth of a man and a woman? Every surrounding, every influence on the girl is for cleanliness of mind and body. It's just the opposite with a boy. And from what I suspect of Dave's youth, the wonder to me is that he is as clean as he is. You probably won't believe it, Rosalie, but many and many a married man who has been entertained in your home has a mistress. Many men have had fifty women in their lives before they were married, and still they are happy. It isn't a nice thought or a comforting thought, but it's life.

"And poor Dave with his one, lone, solitary sin of long ago, condemned and sentenced because he did something before he knew you that he would not even have thought of doing after you two had met.

"Don't misunderstand me, Rosalie. In what I've said, I'm not taking the attitude of condemning men as a sex. Not a bit of it. I like them and sympathize with them. Many women who are considered above reproach would be just about the same as the average man, morally, if conditions were different. They may not actually do the things they think about but the desire is there and that's just as bad.

"The big difference between man and woman is that woman, irrespective of her desires, has had to preserve virtue as her chief asset. Give woman the same privileges as man—take away the value she sets on reputation—and there wouldn't be much choice between the morals of the sexes.

"Getting back to Dave. He is a real man. He loves you and is absolutely true to you. That's rare, my girl, and not to be lightly cast aside. Don't you care for him any more?"

"God help me, I do," said Rosalie softly. "I care for him more than life itself."

"And yet you'll let him go like this?"

"Yes."

"That's the stern Puritan strain in you. It's wrong. Under the cloak of right it is making you commit a crime just as surely as the torture chambers of the Inquisition hid themselves behind the banner of the Holy Cross. Girl, do you realize what you're doing to his life and your own? Wire him as you did me. Call him back."

"I don't know where he is."

"Ah—then if you did know——"

"I would do nothing."

Mrs. Ainsworth cast aside her fur coat and rising went to the door and opened it. Across the vast blue skies yellow stars hung in glorious northern radiance. There was an air of restfulness and grandeur in the sight, a reminder that in the great scheme of things the universe makes the trials and tribulations of atoms here below seem infinitesimal. She sighed and closed the door.

"I am tired, my dear. We won't talk any more tonight. Let's go to bed." And as she clasped the girl closely in her arms, her glance rested for a moment on the baby Rosalie asleep in the crib and she added softly:

"And let's pray—for a miracle."

In the morning, across the black waters of the lake, under a leaden sky came a tiny craft propelled by the arms of a soft-hatted giant in the stern while in the bow, a tan overcoat surmounted by a derby covered a New York lawyer who had travelled far for the sake of a friend. As they came to the river mouth, the sun suddenly broke out from behind a cloud, almost like a token.

Mrs. Ainsworth saw them first.

"Rosalie," she called, "there's someone coming in a boat. Two of them. People, I mean, not boats."

"Him boss," grunted Pierre, the guide, as he slouched down to the log pier and pulled the nose of the craft alongside.

Grimly David Power strode across the clearing, Shapiro close upon his heels. He bowed gravely to Mrs. Ainsworth and entered the house.

Beyond one tell-tale gesture of hand to fluttering heart, Rosalie made no sign. In front of her was the crib in which the baby reposed, offering a barrier. David stopped.

"Rosalie," he said, and his voice was low and steady, "I have come back."

She made no reply.

"Won't you even speak to me?" he asked.

Her gaze averted, her head low, she stood silent as the grave.

Heedless of the other occupants of the room, Dave spoke and the thoughts in his mind broke forth like a flood.

"I might as well warn you now. I see this thing in a different light from when I left, and God helping me I'm going to do what I feel is right regardless of everyone in the world beside we three."

And clumsily his hand rested for a tender instant upon the head of the child. Milton Shapiro glanced significantly at Mrs. Ainsworth, who was watching Rosalie intently. The crisis had come.

"Rosalie, I've been a fool. I've been on the verge of doing something that would have filled the rest of our lives, yes *our* lives, with regret, and my only reason for doing this damnable thing was because you told me to.

"But I've awakened and I'm here. I am not going to do what you bade me. I *am* going to do what my heart tells me to do and that can't help but be right.

"Rosalie, I have sinned, that I admit, but it was a sin of ignorance—committed long before I knew you or dreamed of this." He looked down at the

little girl and she smiled at her father; Rosalie shifted her gaze and their eyes met. From that moment he was master.

"Up to the time I met you I didn't know what convention or chivalry was. My life had been spent with people who lived by the sword and I was one of them.

"This convention, this terrible shackle that binds you to do things you don't want to do for fear other people will talk and criticise, was a gradual growth. It came almost unconsciously. You see, Rosalie, I knew you cared what others said about me. And I cared for you. So I willingly, yes, gladly, submitted to the fetters. And I loved them because you wanted it and I cared for you.

"And the other day when you bade me go, I wasn't man enough to cast aside the ball and chain and follow my heart and refuse. No! Like any other poor, weak slave of so-called chivalry, I bowed my head and departed.

"Not until I sat in Shapiro's office, like a poor dumb beast preparing for slaughter, making preparations to give up the only things in the world that meant anything to me, did I awaken.

"And as the result of that awakening, I am here —here to stay.

"For, Rosalie, girl, when you took me for your husband, you loved me. And when I told you the truth the other day, yes, about the woman, you still loved me. I love you. I have since the first moment I met you. I always will and I can neither curb nor control it nor would if I could. Without you, my life would be nothing.

"I won't ask you to forgive me. But—mark my words well—you can't send me away. I won't go! For the shackles are off my feet. The old David Power is back.

"What I want I keep, and even though the whole world point to me as a fool or worse, I'm going to follow you to the end of my days. Divorce me—curse me—have me arrested—do anything, everything, and I will still be with you. I have no pride, nothing. In the mere sight of you I find happiness, and everything else goes down before that selfish—yes, I admit it—thought."

Rosalie stood like a woman in a trance, her eyes fixed on him, her lips parted and her hands clasped tightly together, then crumpled and dropped to her knees before the crib. Great sobs shook her shoulders as her head bowed over the child.

A wave of agony swept over Power's face, and he too dropped to his knees.

"Rosalie, Rosalie," and as he spoke he reached hesitatingly across the crib to touch her, "don't cry, girl, don't! I'm weak. God help me, I can't do it. Your wish is more to me than my happiness—I'll go."

She lifted her head and as he looked a wonderful smile dawned through the tears and he felt her take his two hands in hers across the child's body.

"Dave," she said, "don't you see? I'm crying because I'm so happy."

FINIS